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FICTION WEEKLY

FORMERLY FLYNN'S

OCT. 2

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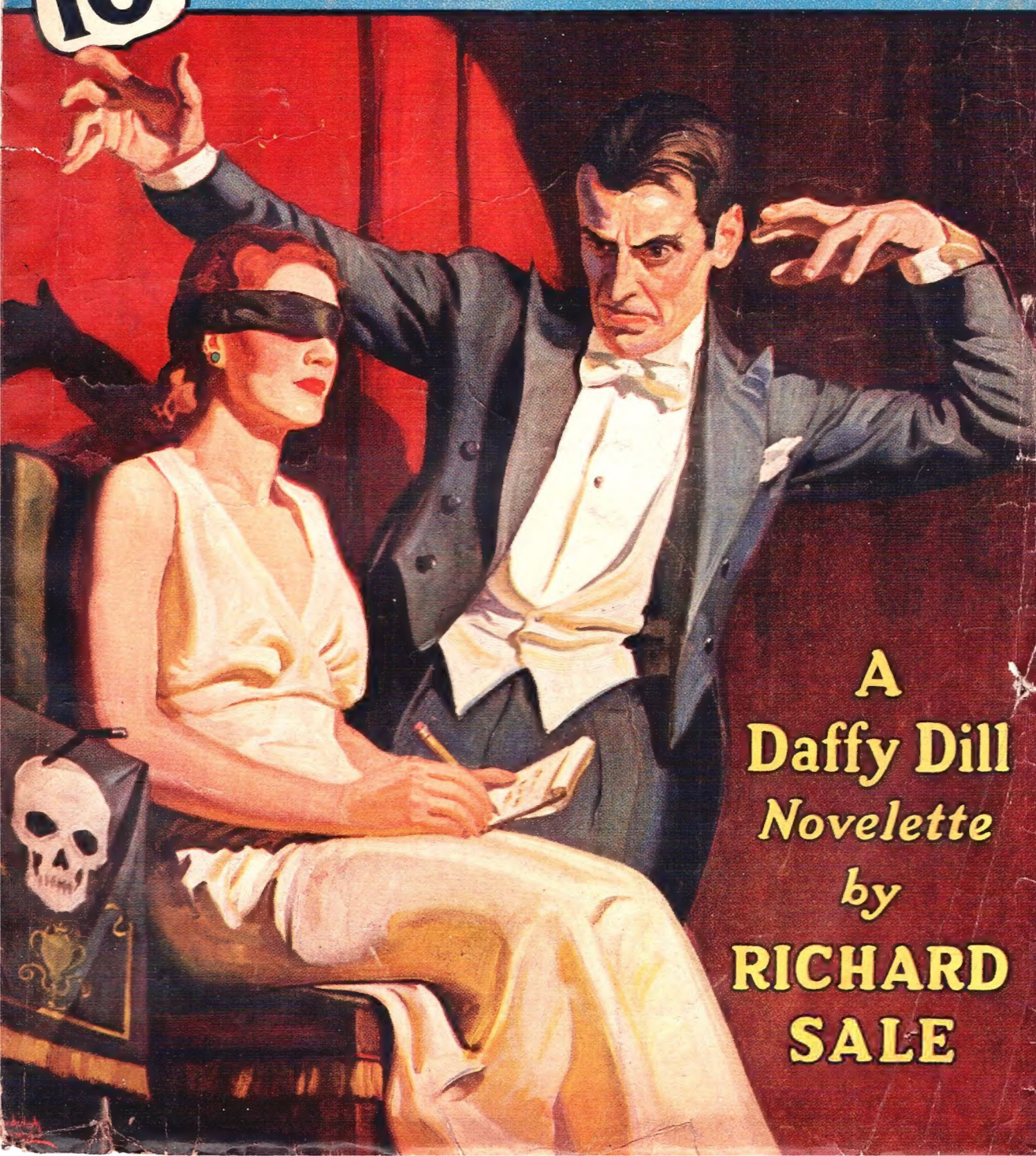

A Daffy Dill Novelette by RICHARD SALE

Black Swirling Water Swept Her Out of Sight.....

Girl Leaps for Ferryboat and Misses: C. C. C. Rescuers Plunge Among Ice Floes

Harold Watson of 64 Scholes St. and his pal Joseph Flanagan of 717 Madison St., Brooklyn, N. Y., who were rewarded with C. C. C. Certificates of Valor signed by President Roosevelt.

"A girl came running down the dock as the boat pulled away. She jumped . . . and missed," writes Harold Watson, "falling into the icy swirling water. Standing as I was on the deck of the ferryboat with my buddy Joe Flanagan, I saw her swept under the pier while those on the dock couldn't tell where she was.

"One man had a flashlight but he didn't know where to shine it . . . I had to have it so I jumped back on the dock and dove after the girl with the flashlight in my mouth. I found her easy enough, but it was so cold in there amongst cakes of floating ice I couldn't do more than just hold her up. It looked like we both would drown . . . I was ready to give up . . . when I realized Joe was shouting at me, saw him swimming toward us towing a life preserver. Thanks to him we got the life preserver under the girl and brought her out from under the dock where soldiers in a life boat pulled us out.

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(*Signed*)

Harold Watson"

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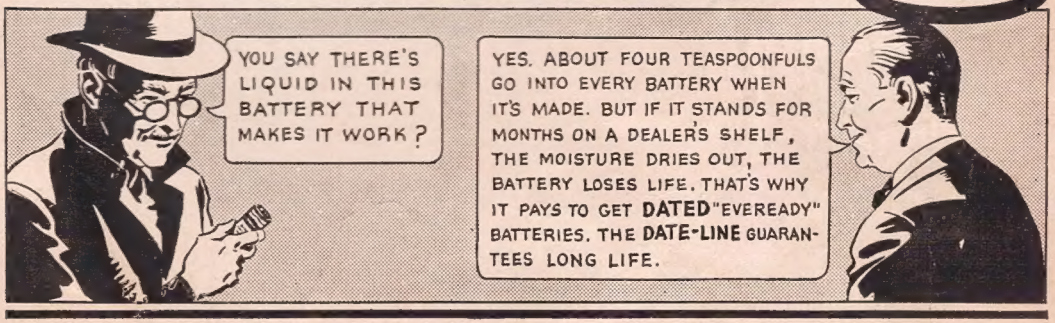
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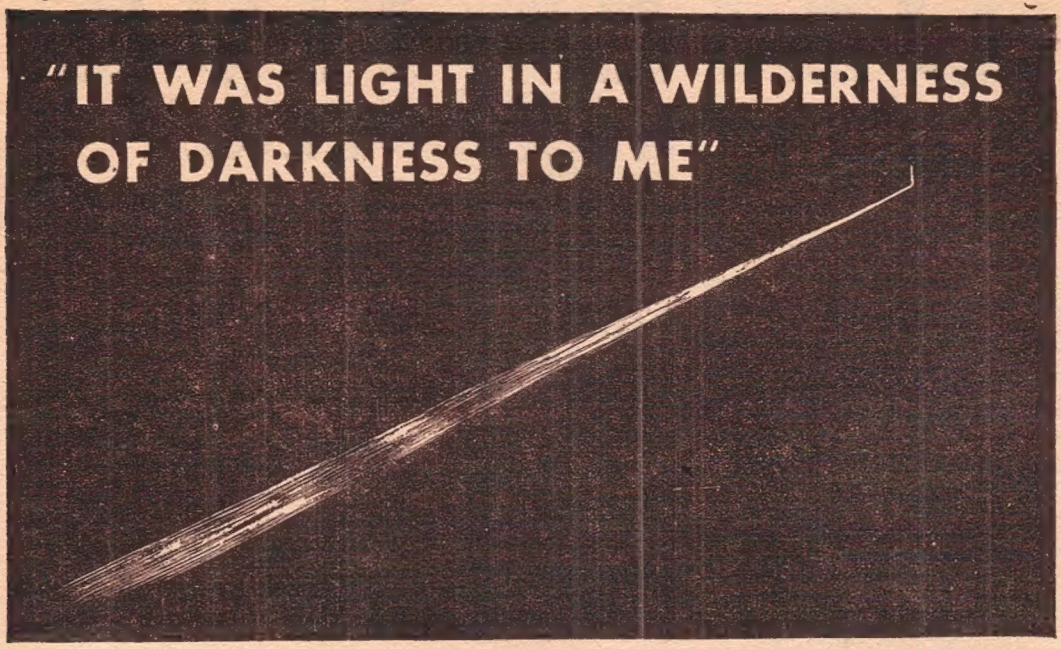

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VOLUME CXIV — *OCTOBER 2, 1937* — NUMBER 2

Give, Ghost, Give!.....*Novelette*.....Richard Sale 6
Daffy Dill Invades the Spirit World

The Odds on Murder.....*Short Story*.....Wyatt Blassingame 30
A Gambling Man Bets His Life on a Wild Hunch

Mountain Man.....*Novelette*.....Norbert Davis 42
The Mountains Labored and Brought Forth a Rat

The Little Stranger from Poland.*Short Story*.Whitman Chambers 62
All Is Not Polish That Speaks It

Illustrated Crimes.....*Feature*.....Stookie Allen 72
The Man From the Panhandle

Murder C. O. D.....*6 parts—3*.....Fred MacIsaac 74
Consignee versus Consignor

Anything for a Friend.....*Short Story*.....Eric Howard 94
It Was a Screwy Set-Up—Even For Hollywood

Private War.....*Novelette*.....Cleve F. Adams 105
A Good Cop Goes the Limit for Duty

Episode of the Hidden Footprints.*True Vignette*.James W. Booth 127
A Canadian Mountie Bucks Northland Odds

Publicity Stunt.....*Short Story*.....Bert Collier 129
The Mayor Was a Cinder in the Public Eye

"They're Swindling You!".....*Feature*.....Frank Wrentmore 137
An Escape from Sharks

Solving Cipher Secrets.....*Feature*.....M. E. Ohaver 141

Flashes From Readers..... 143

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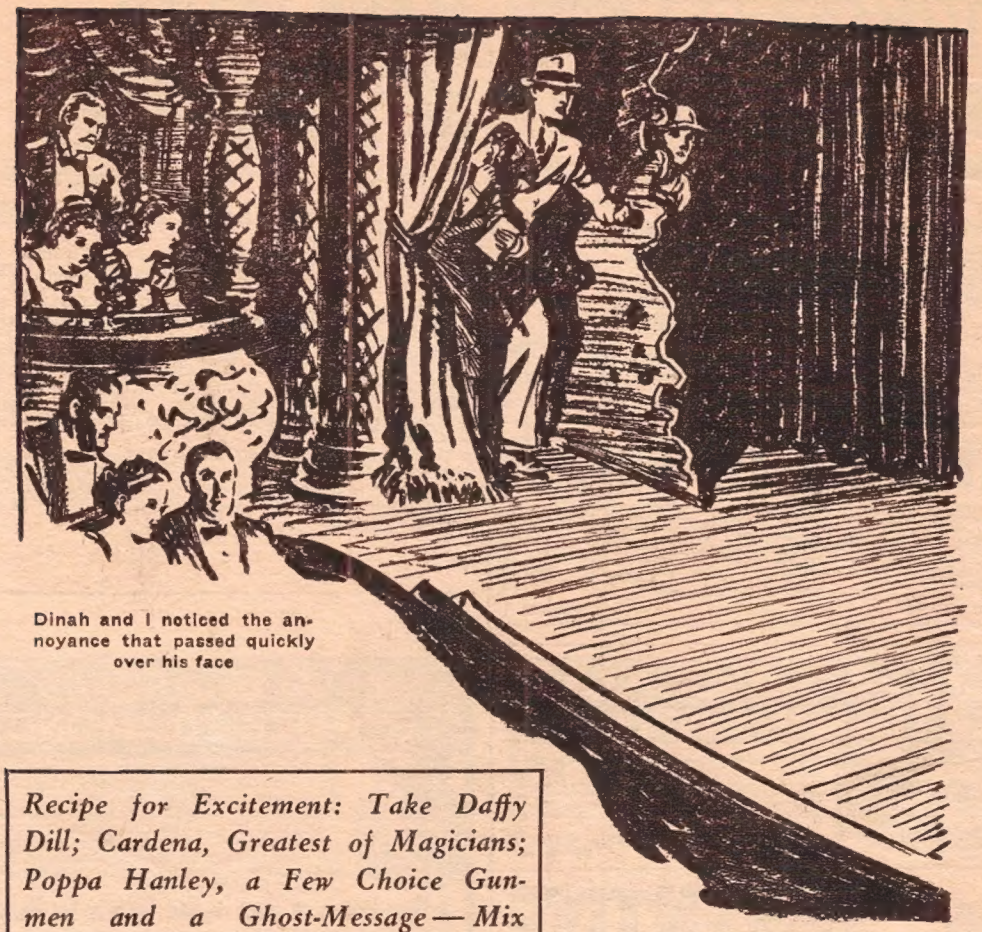

Dinah and I noticed the annoyance that passed quickly over his face

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GIVE, GHOST, GIVE!

A Novelette

By Richard Sale

Author of "You Can't Print That," etc.

THE Press Club at eight P. M. on a summer's day is something to see. Every leg-man from every rag in town is there, bending the elbow and imbibing. It's a little place down on Worth Street, not far from the old *World* building where Joe Pulitzer used to hang out his shingle. It is the meeting place for all the boys, rewrite men, colyumists, fotogs, reporters, even city editors. It makes a business of selling two things inexpensively and well: spirits and steaks.

Sammy Lyons and I mushed into

Cardena fired the gun but nothing happened. A low murmur of surprise ran through the audience

the Press Club at about ten minutes after eight on a Thursday eve in quest of spirits—not steak. I'd run myself bow-legged all over town after a quantity of stories which finally evolved into something worth a few sticks. Sammy Lyons, that gay young caballero from the Bronx who covers the waterfront for the New York *Chronicle* where we both work and slave for a more or less honest living, had had a big day. Garbo—the real Garbo—had returned from Sweden on the S.S. *Chisholm* and had granted one of those rare interviews to the ship news reporters. Sammy had asked her a question: "Are you planning on staying in New York awhile?" to which she had replied: "No." Sammy just had to have a drink. "Daffy," he told me proudly, "she spoke to me! Garbo! I have lived! We've got to drink on that!"

We stepped into the Press Club at ten past eight and promptly found ourselves in a madhouse. Sampson and Roller were there from the *Chronicle;* Browne from the *Star,* Maloney from the *Herald,* Kensey from the *Messenger;* just about everybody in the Fourth Estate had gathered to celebrate the fact that the day's work was over.

Sammy and I crowded in against the bar. *"Carramba!"* Sammy cried with gusto. "A rye punch, *Señor* Bartender, and a pretzel!"

I said, "An old-fashioned without a pretzel."

"And for me," another voice suddenly broke in, "just the pretzel, on account of there's no rest for the weary."

I wheeled around and there stood Dinah Mason, the one and only Dinah with her silvery hair glistening, her beautiful lower lip drooping sadly, her pulchritudinous eyes gloomy. In case you came in late, Dinah is the light of my life, the reason why I get hot and cold spells. Also she is a gal with a mind of her own, what there is of it. She hasn't married me four hundred and thirty-eight times, which same number of times she has been asked. "Garbo!" I cried.

"Garbo?" Sammy breathed tremulously. "She? This wench you call Garbo? It is plasphemy! It is sacrilege! It is unfair to organized labor!"

Dinah stared at him. "What's wrong with that screwball?" she asked. "He acts kind of goofy."

"Ah!" Sammy said dreamily as he sipped his rye punch. "I shall remember this day forever. Me, Samuel Lyons. I interviewed Garbo. And she spoke to me. Sweet bliss, sweet bliss."

Dinah sighed. "You go around with the nicest people, darling. As for me, I feel like the original Nelly Bly. I've been hightailing all around this town today. Three new pictures opened uptown and I didn't have any assistant to foist one upon. Had to cover them all. And when day is done and I'm planning to take my eyes home and put them to bed, what happens?"

"I'll bite," I said. "What happens?"

"The bald-headed little gnome who calls himself the Old Man and edits the *Chronicle* in his own haphazard way, hears something on the radio. 'Dinah,' he says, 'that would make a nice feature for the theater section tomorrow.' 'Chief,' I say, 'dusk is in the offing. I work here from nine to five.' 'Ha-ha,' he says. 'Cover the yarn.' And here I am."

She munched her pretzel.

"He's like that," I said. "He lets you spill your heart out to him and then he laughs. He cut himself with a razor the other day and a drop of his blood fell on a fly."

"What happened?"

"Fly froze to death. What is the yarn anyhow?"

"Just an interview," Dinah replied wearily. "A magician who is appearing at the Jurark Theater on 50th Street. Some big shot who used to know Houdini and Thurston and Kellar and all the great magic-men and escape artists. His name's Thardo Cardena."

"Thardo Cardena!" I said. "He's swell. I saw him once a couple of years ago and he darn near knocked my eyes out. He did a strait-jacket escape in full view of the audience. There wasn't a pair of handcuffs could hold him. He sawed a woman in half, stuck a hand in a pot of boiling lead, took a mouthful of lead and pulled out the chunk which hardened with the imprint of his teeth in it. I always wanted to know how he pulled that one where he shoots an arrow right through a girl into the target behind her without hurting her at all."

"As for me," Dinah said, making a face, "magic is something I can do without. I think it's boring. Same old gadgets, same old tricks."

"A cynic, hah?" I said. "And whyfore the interview with Thardo Cardena? What brings him into the news?"

"Radio brings him into the news," she said. "He was on the air last night as the guest on some program and he

said something which the Old Man wants to know more about."

I DRANK my drink. "What'd he say?"

"That's a long story," Dinah said. "Hand me another pretzel. . . . Well, it seems that Thardo Cardena is a ghost breaker. Doesn't believe that spirits and spooks can communicate from the grave. The greatest escape artist and magician of them all, Bernard Devoneaux, felt the same way about it. You remember how Devoneaux exposed all those fake mediums and spiritualists before he died?"

"Daffy remembers," I said. "Give more. Very interesting."

"Houdini felt the same way," Dinah went on. "Thomas Edison wondered whether or not it were possible to communicate with anyone beyond the grave. I think he even tried to make a machine which might do the trick. The idea has always been fascinating. But it didn't work."

"So?"

"When Bernard Devoneaux died—five or six years ago I think it was—"

"Right. 1931."

"—he left behind him a parchment with a twelve-word sentence written on it in his own hand. With the parchment, he left fifty thousand dollars in ice cold cash. This was all delivered to Thardo Cardena before Devoneaux actually passed away. They were close friends. Devoneaux wanted to try an experiment."

"This gets better," I said. "What was the experiment?"

"Hold your horses," said Dinah. "We get there now. When Devoneaux was dead and buried, Thardo Cardena came forward and issued a public challenge to each and every spiritualist and mystic and ghost-communer and medium in the world. He explained that Devoneaux had left a message with him which was now locked in a vault in a Chicago bank. Custodian of the vault was the American Society of Magicians. Only one man on earth knew the message: Thardo Cardena. Otherwise the twelve-word sentence was an imprisoned secret. The challenge was thus: Fifty thousand dollars to the woman, man, or child who could give that twelve-word sentence."

"Yea verily," I murmured, "and a safe bet. A fine chance you'd have of ever guessing a whole twelve-word sentence. Nobody has ever broken through it, I'll bet."

"No one has," Dinah said tiredly. "But you're not supposed to guess what the sentence is, cluck. The whole point of the thing was this: Devoneaux said that if it were possible for spirits to return after death, he himself would come back, tell the message to some one. The whole thing was planned to see if anyone could ever actually return from the dead and make known a ghost presence in a tangible way."

"No soap," I grunted. "Can't be did."

"Of course it can't be done, Daffy. But that isn't the point now. It's a good news story. Thardo Cardena was on the radio last night and issued the challenge again. The Old Man thought it would be a good yarn if I got Cardena to tell about some of the chiselers who had tried to break the message of Devoneaux by trickery of sorts."

"Trickery? How?"

"Oh, hypnotism, mind-reading, telepathy."

"That is an angle," I said. "Would make good reading."

"I'm glad you think so," Dinah said sweetly. "Because you are coming with

me tonight when I meet Thardo Cardena."

"Ha-ha," I said sadly. "Nix."

Dinah fixed a cold imperious eye on me. "You're coming with me whether you like it or not."

She took me by the arm and started to lead me off. I paid for my drink, said goodby to Sammy, grabbed a pretzel from the tray on the bar, asked the barkeep to render Hearts and Flowers on his bazooka, and away I went. We caught a cab outside and hopped in.

"Jurark Theater on West 50th," Dinah said. "And don't spare the pistons!"

The driver stared at her. There was no mistaking the fact that he considered her a genuine pixy. He shook his head and sighed heavily and shifted. Off we went in a cloud of Worth Street dust.

II

WHEN Dinah and I reached the theater on West 50th, it was after eight-thirty P. M. and the performance had already started inside. I paid off the chariot racer and then we lolled around the front of the theater for a bit and took in the advertisements.

Finally we went down the side alley to the back stage entrance of the Jurark and showed our press cards and walked in. The show was on. We could hear the audience applauding. We knew that Cardena wouldn't be in his dressing room, so we walked over to the wings where the stagehands had gathered and we stayed quiet. Nobody bothered with us. I figured we might run into some trouble because Thardo Cardena had always been pretty secretive about his tricks and I had considered that we might see a few of them explained by watching him from the wings instead of from a $4.40 audience seat. I was wrong.

I couldn't see how he did the damn things even if I was standing in the wings.

The first act was nearly over. Cardena had allowed himself to be placed in a big milk can without a bottom. The can had been placed over him on the stage. On top of the can went a huge cake of ice. The ice had been hollowed out to fit the shape of the can. The ice now sat down on the floor and you could see the can inside. The floor was solid too. An inspection committee from the audience had looked it over. No trapdoor under that milk can and ice. As Dinah and I watched, a big cabinet was lowered down over the ice and the can. One of Cardena's two assistants spoke to the audience. "Mr. Cardena," he said, "is now in the can buried beneath a huge cake of ice. He will escape from that can in just five minutes flat. Keep count of the minutes."

I GLANCED at my watch and we waited. Dinah whispered: "Can't be did. Against the laws of nature. No guy—not even you, Adonis Dill—could get out of a milk can like that. And if you did get out of the milk can, will you kindly tell me how you would get through that hunk of Arctic over it?"

"The hand is quicker than the eye," I said. "Four minutes. Just watch. He does it somehow."

We waited. Sixty seconds ticked off. Suddenly there was a hollow knocking on the cabinet, a signal to raise it up. A yank by the stagehands and up it went.

Thardo Cardena stood nonchalantly beside the cake of ice which was still atop the milk can on the floor.

The applause was thunderous. I even forgot myself and gave him the glad hand from the wings. The curtain finally was rung down and the first act was over.

"There he goes," Dinah said. "Let's talk with him now and get it over with I'd like to know how he did that."

"Oh," I said with sarcasm, "he'll tell you. He tells all his secrets. That's why people come to see him."

"That acid," Dinah said, "is going to do your digestion no good. Let's go."

It was easy enough to get into his dressing room. We knocked. He said: "Come in." Dinah told him who she was and why she was there. He told her to go ahead.

He looked older than when I had seen him years before. That time his hair had been jet black and very slick. Now it was touched with gray at the temples and had softened. It made his thin straight nose and severe jaw seem less sharp. He chatted amiably, answering all of Dinah's more sensible questions, wittily parrying her queries about his tricks of trade.

"But how do you do it?" Dinah said. "How do you get out of a milk can and a cake of ice?"

"It's all mental," Thardo Cardena replied with a wry smile. "You wish yourself out and presto—there you are." He laughed. "My dear Miss Mason, if I told you my secrets, I wouldn't have any business left, would I?"

"I can keep a secret," Dinah said. "Women can keep secrets just as well as men."

"Only," I put in, "it takes more of them to do it."

"Quiet, please," Dinah growled, trying to look mad.

Cardena laughed soundly. "About this other matter though," he said pleasantly. "The twelve-word message which Devoneaux left me. There have been people who tried to claim the fifty thousand dollars. Every time I issue the challenge, some man or woman immediately gets in touch with me, certain he or she has the wording. Why, since my broadcast last night, I've had four telegrams. A woman in Boston says that Devoneaux came to her in a dream and told her the message was the first twelve words of the Lord's Prayer. It isn't, of course. People are always trying to guess it and it's utterly impossible to guess. Devoneaux wrote such a message as to make it only possible for he himself to return from the grave and tell some one. In other words, his ghost had to give the solution or there was to be no solution. He didn't believe in ghosts. Neither do I. That was the point we were trying to prove and have proved to date."

"But suppose some one did get the message," Dinah said. "Or let's suppose I thought I had the message. How would I go about collecting it—the mazuma, I mean?"

"You'd get in touch with me," Thardo Cardena smiled. "You would tell me what the message was. If you should happen to be right, you would then have to go to Chicago to the Magicians' Society. I would have to call them, tell them you were right, authorize them to open the vault, read the parchment, then pay you the money. You would have to tell, though, how you came into knowledge of the message."

"You mean if I guessed it, I'd have to say I guessed it?"

"Yes. You would be paid nevertheless. But I promise you—no one will ever guess that message."

A warning buzzer sounded in the

dressing-room. Cardena put out his cigarette and rose. "That's my second act curtain," he said. "I do hope you've managed to eke a story out of this."

"I've got a swell yarn," Dinah said. "Thanks a lot. And you won't tell me how you got out from that ice?"

He shook his head. "If you liked that one, watch the first act of the second part now. It's called the Cask Trick. Stay in the wings and watch it. I think you'll like it."

WE ALL went out. Cardena took the center of the stage with one of his assistants. Out front the orchestra blared and the curtain slowly went up as the footlights brightened. A spotlight picked Cardena out in the stage, stuck to him. The applause was thunderous. When it had subsided, Cardena spoke.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I want you to observe this huge cask on the stage." He went over to it. It was a big squat thing built like a barrel but large enough to take a man inside. He and his assistant rolled it to the center of the stage. One end was open, the other end closed. Cardena showed the open side to the audience. "Observe, the cask is empty," he said.

They then placed the cask down on the stage with the solid side on top. Cardena took a wooden mallet and began to pound the top. "It is entirely solid. There are no trapdoors in this cask. It is built of solid pine." Which was true. It was solid as a rock. There was nothing on the inside but a chinning bar which ran across the cask's diameter. He kept pounding the top of the cask to show its solidity.

Then he and the assistant lifted the cask a few inches off the stage and placed it on a small raised platform where they turned the open end up. A hoop of paper was placed over the open end. Cardena took out a blank cartridge pistol. "When I fire this gun," he said, "a man will materialize within the cask and burst out from the top of it. . . . Are you ready? . . ." A murmur ran through the audience. "Go!" He fired the gun.

There was a moment of dead silence.

Nothing happened. . . .

THERE was silence for a long time throughout the entire theater. Then a low surprised murmur ran through the audience. It was the supreme moment. They had come to see the impossible, hoping that they could break through the trickery. Here, for once, a trick had gone wrong. They should have jeered and hooted. But instead they were disappointed. They didn't believe in magic, but felt that they wanted to.

I watched Cardena. There was an expression of intense annoyance on his face for a brief moment, and then it was gone as he quickly became a showman, remembering the old adage: "Always smile at the $4.40 seats even if Gabriel blows his horn!"

Thardo Cardena smiled. The audience smiled back at him.

He said, "I'll make another try."

He fired the gun again. Again nothing happened. The audience laughed politely and got restless. Cardena saw that he was either going to be a fool or a good sport. He chose the latter. He laughed loudly and shook his head. The audience laughed with him. "It seems," he said jocularly, "as though the magician has been fooled this time, as well as the audience. I'm sorry to say the trick is a failure. There will be no materialization within the cask."

The audience laughed again and applauded heartily. Cardena turned to his

assistant and told him to wheel the cask off the stage.

The assistant turned the cask over on its side to roll it off the stage. In doing so, he overbalanced the top. The open part with the paper stretched across it like the top of a drum was facing the audience. What happened, came with such a shock that the audience gasped in horror as though but one voice were in the theater.

One of Cardena's assistants came bursting out of the cask headfirst. He broke through the paper with a certain zest like a bareback rider jumping through a hoop. But instead of rising to his feet to bow to applause, the assistant lay in a heap on the stage and did not move.

You didn't have to be in the first ten rows to see that the assistant wouldn't move on his own again this side of eternity.

He was as dead a herring as I ever saw.

Thárdo Cardena glanced at the body. His face didn't change except for a barely perceptible tightening of the mouth. He turned toward the wings and said, "Bring the curtain down, please."

The curtain dropped quickly.

It was a black curtain.

Dinah and I were out on that stage as fast as any one else around. Cardena's calm vanished. He seemed to go to pieces. The sweat was standing out on his face in huge cold beads and he wrung his hands vainly and kept snapping: "A doctor! Get a doctor!"

"No use," I said. "This baby is gone."

"Dead?"

"Never'll be deader," I said. I turned to Dinah. "You'd better give Poppa Hanley a ring and tell him to come running with his buzzards. This guy's been murdered and there's no two ways about that."

"Right, Daffy," Dinah said, looking very pale. "I'll call Poppa."

"And the paper," I said. "File your story. What was this guy's name, Cardena?"

"Joe Simmons," Cardena said. "It can't be true—"

"Joe Simmons," I told Dinah, "stabbed in the back during Thardo Cardena's performance at the Jurark Theater. Give the Old Man a flash and a sub-flash and maybe he can break it in the sports final. There may still be time."

Dinah skipped and was gone.

"All right," I said. "Can you go on with this show, Cardena? Can you finish it up with one man to help?"

"I suppose I can, but I'm all shot to pieces—my nerves—do you think I could make a go of it?"

"That's the way the word 'trouper' was born," I said. "Cut some acts and make it short but get through it. You muggs—" I nodded at the stage hands, "—help me get this body off the stage."

We carried it to Cardena's dressing room while the curtain went up and Cardena explained that one of his assistants had been taken ill. The audience applauded the assistant who was dead and could not hear the fanfare. The show, severely cut, continued.

The knife wasn't in the wound. I took Simmons' clothes off and looked him over while I waited for Poppa Hanley. The fire inspector for the theater came in and we managed to shoo every one else out.

Simmons was a little man. His body showed lithe muscles. He looked to be around thirty years old, dark, slim, mustached. His ears were big, his eyes were closed, his mouth hung open, bleeding slightly.

The wound in his back was on the left side. The chances were that it had not only punctured his left lung but had also speared his heart. He had died in a hurry. There was an expression of intense shock on his face.

CARDENA came off the stage in a brief intermission while his other assistant, a man named Howard Fremont, did some clever card tricks which he wound up by hurling—one by one—an entire pack of cards into all parts of the theater.

"Cardena," I said, "you may as well get used to the idea right now. You're going to have to answer some questions. One of them will be how that cask trick was supposed to work. So I'll ask you first. This guy was killed while he waited to materialize."

"Under the stage!" Cardena cried. "Look under the stage then! That's where he was! That's where they stabbed him!"

"I'll look," said the Irish fire inspector. "I'll take a couple of boys with me."

"Bring back anyone or anything down there," I said.

"Shure, lad."

When he had gone, I asked: "And the cask trick?"

Cardena sat down. He was tired and nervous. He wiped his face with a handkerchief and lighted a cigarette and then spoke. "Simple thing," he said. "Cask was empty when we showed it to the audience. One end closed. One end open. We turned the open end down on the stage. Made the audience think we were doing that to strike the solid end with a hammer to show its solidity. Actually we did it because Simmons had to get into the open end. He did that by pulling down a trapdoor in the stage, springing up and catching hold of the chinning bar, then holding himself there. The trapdoor closed by its own spring. The hammering covered up the sound. When we turned the cask open end up, we did that *away* from the audience. Simmons was already in it. Then we put the paper on and I fired the pistol. All Simmons had to do was spring up and through the paper. It was a popular trick."

"Did you see Simmons in it tonight when you put the paper on?"

"Of course. He was sitting in the bottom. He looked all slumped down but I didn't think anything of it. That's why it upset me when I fired the gun and he didn't break through the paper. I *knew* he was there! And then when he tumbled out dead . . ."

I nodded. "Ice water. Must have been a sweet thing for you out on a stage." I took a breath. "So Joe Simmons got it while he was under the stage. Maybe. Maybe not. Look, Cardena. You say he had to jump up to reach the bar in the cask. He couldn't have done that dead. Could he?"

"No," Cardena said slowly. "He had to be alive to get in the cask."

"Yet," I said, "you saw him slumped down when you turned the cask over."

"Yes."

"Which means that he had been stabbed by then."

"He didn't look dead."

I said: "But he had to be stabbed by then or never. Am I right?"

Cardena nodded. "The only possible time he could have been stabbed was when he leaped through the trap door into the cask. He might have had enough strength to hold onto the chinning bar until we turned the cask over. . . . But my word!"

"Yes?"

"Simmons had to stand on top of a ladder to get through the trapdoor. It's ten feet from the stage down to the cellar floor below the stage. Either his murderer was on the ladder with him or else—or else what? How can you stab a man who is atop a ladder and leaping through a trapdoor into a cask above?"

We got our answer without expecting it. The door opened and the fire inspector walked in. "Wasn't a soul down there," he said. "Nothing but a ladder under a trapdoor in the stage. Nothing but that and a lot of old scenery and properties marked 'Ben Hur.'"

I snapped: "What properties?"

"Hell," he said, "there was chariots and shields and spears—"

"Spears!" I said.

Cardena gasped. "My word, of course! An old spear! Hide in the dark there, jab up at Simmons as he made the leap."

TEN minutes later, Poppa Hanley arrived with Dr. Kerr Kyne, chief M. E. of New York County, and Detectives Claghorn and Babcock of the homicide squad. Poppa—who never smoked—was chewing on his favorite cigar, which meant he was ready for anything. He set the boys to work after a laconic: "Hello, Daffy. Getting to be a kind of ghoul ain't you?" And then he added: "Black Maria is on her way. What have you got here?"

I told him the whole story. It was simple enough.

"Very simple," Poppa grunted, pulling at his long ears. "Very simple indeed, Daffy. We've got the corpse. We know just when and how and where he was murdered. The spear is probably right downstairs. Yes, very simple."

"Isn't it though?" I said warily.

"Sure is," said Poppa. "All we have to do now is find out why Simmons was killed and then—I know it ain't important, Daffy—but the law requires that we find out who." He glared at me and shook his head. "Very simple indeed. . . ."

III

IN TWO days, the Simmons case was colder than an iceberg. It died a slow and natural death. It was one of those things. Plenty of evidence round and about, but none which added up to two and two. I went off to Philadelphia on an exquisite ax murder for the *Chronicle*. I read a few quips about the Simmons thing in one of the Phillie newsrags and then it dropped off the front page entirely and I forgot all about it.

I'd been in Philadelphia for four days and the case down there was beginning to die so I called the Old Man in New York and told him so. "You're wasting money," I said. "They got the gal who did the dirty work, she's in the jug, she'll be indicted and she'll fry. There isn't an angle to the whole debauchery that the Associated Press can't cover. How about it?"

"You sound homesick," said the Old Man. "As a matter of fact, you might as well come home. There won't be any more news in that ax thing until the trial comes along . . . Wait a second, Daffy. Dinah wants a word."

I said, "Put her on."

"Hello, darling," Dinah said presently, "have you missed me much?"

"No," I said. "This town is full of blondes. And natural blondes at that."

"I like that!" she flared. "If you can prove that I ever dyed my hair a single time—"

"Skip it," I said wearily. "Skip it." A woman never has a sense of humor

at the right time. "What's new, Angel-Eyes?"

"Poppa Hanley has a headache," she replied. "He's been up to his ears since you left. He told me last night he wished you would come home and have a brainstorm."

"What's the matter?"

"You know," she said. "The Simmons murder in the Jurark Theater."

"Oh, that," I said. "I'd almost forgotten about it."

"So has every one else but the Police Commissioner," Dinah said. "The old Commish has been riding Poppa Hanley's tail, asking for an arrest on the thing. It's a funny setup, Daffy. They can't find a thing on Joe Simmons himself. He wasn't married. He had no friends. He had no past. Poppa checked the fingerprints and sent them around the country. He hasn't had a reply yet, and that means that Simmons didn't have a criminal past. We know the corpse is Simmons, but Daffy—it's just like having an unidentified body. Poppa is stalemated."

"Look," I said, "what about the stagehands? Didn't they see anyone that night? Anyone who shouldn't have been backstage at the Jurark Theater?"

"They saw two people," Dinah said with sarcasm. "Those two people were you and me. *I* didn't bump Simmons. Maybe you did."

"Very funny," I said sadly. "You tell Poppa I'm catching the Senator out of this burg when it breezes through here tonight. Tell him I'll buzz him in the morning."

"What about me?" Dinah asked. "Dinner tonight when you get home, eh?"

"Sure," I said. "Dinner tonight—all by your lonesome. I'm going to be busy."

"Fresh!"

The bang at the other end of the wire told me that the conversation had reached an abrupt end. I hung up.

I REACHED Pennsylvania Station at about ten past seven P. M. Those crack trains really travel on that Washington run. The streamlined GG1 was about the last word in electric locomotives. I caught a cab outside the station and went home to my apartment at 45th Street.

I took a hot bath and I was just changing into another suit when the telephone rang.

I picked up the handset and I said hello.

"Daffy Dill?"

"Speaking, fran. It's your simoleon."

"This is Thardo Cardena," he replied. "I'm glad I caught you in. I want to see you."

"Yea, verily," I said. "Are you telling me that you just happened to call up this instant?"

"Why, yes . . ."

"My young man of magic, I've only been home for the last fifteen minutes. I've been away for four days."

Cardena laughed strainedly. "Then I *am* lucky."

"What did you want to see me about?"

"Simmons," he said. "I think I've finally found a lead. I don't want to go to the police with it because I may get involved and the publicity would do me no good. But this sort of thing is your living, I understood, and if there was a story—"

"Never," I said, "apologize to a Dill for giving him a break on a news story. Where'll I meet you?"

"May I drop by at your place? I'm dressed for the theater and your street is on the way. I've a performance tonight at eight-thirty."

"By all means. I'll be waiting for you."

"In about fifteen minutes then."

"Okay."

I FINISHED dressing and I made myself a cup of coffee. When I had tossed it off, I went out and unlocked my desk and took out my *pistole,* as we Basques pronounce it. This gun was the light of my life, Dinah Mason notwithstanding. I'd bought it in El Paso the time Candid Jones and I were chasing the Black Benny Dorgan gang transcontinental after the million dollar Temple snatch they pulled. It was a Samuel Colt job, the original six-shooter, .31 calibre. The stock was ivory, stained brown from the grip of my hands. The barrel glistened immaculately. No automatic job, this. When you fired more than once, you fanned smoke just like a cowhand. Cock it and bang! Cock it and bang! It was a gem.

It would have been smarter, of course, to use an auto pistol as long as you had need of a gun. But there is a little Benvenuto Cellini in all of us. And this Colt gravescratcher was my contribution to the romance of hero worship.

Thardo Cardena arrived at around a quarter of eight. He had changed a little in that week. He looked gaunt and weary. There were bags under his eyes and his mouth hung down. He wore full evening dress, top hat, opera cloak, cane. "I'm glad to see you again," he said sincerely as he wrung my hand.

"Ditto here," I said. "You don't look so good. How's the act been going?"

"Very bad," he replied. "Audience doesn't know it, of course, but it's trying. Very hard. One assistant isn't enough on some of those tricks. Look here, Daffy—do you mind if I call you Daffy?"

"Not a bit."

"Look here then. I've got a lead. I think it's a definite lead. . . . Is that a gun?"

"It is. What's the lead?"

"Well, I've been making discreet inquiries around the Jurark trying to find one of the stagehands who might possibly have had a motive for killing poor Simmons. One thing you can be sure of: a stagehand killed Simmons. I know that. I'm particular about anyone being allowed backstage during my performance. Too much chance of a stranger learning the secret of my tricks. You and Miss Mason were allowed because you were definitely newspaper people. But no one else, other than the complete stage crew, was there."

"And you found a motive?"

He shook his head. "No, I didn't find a motive. But I've found the man who did it. At least, I think he did it."

"Who?"

"His name is Roy Quay," said Cardena. "And I think he did it because he's the only stagehand at the Jurark Theater whom I don't know personally. The others have been there for years. I've seen them before during engagements. But not this chap."

"What about him?" I asked.

"He's from Chicago," said Cardena. "He got the job at the Jurark a week before I opened there. One of the regular stagehands, Bill Akes, quit. Quay happened to be on the spot and got the berth. Now Simmons lived in Chicago, you know. It's possible that Simmons and Quay were enemies, that Quay followed Simmons to New York—"

"I see," I said. "Do you know where Bill Akes lives?"

"The chap who quit? No, I don't. I could learn easily."

"Do that thing," I said. "And we'll ask him a few questions. There's the phone."

Cardena nodded. He telephoned the Jurark Theater and got the manager, Sam Hopkins, who looked up the records and gave him the address of William Akes. Akes had a telephone too, a four-party line. Cardena wrote down the number, thanked Hopkins, then hung up.

I took the number from him and called it. There was a long wait and then a gruff scratchy voice replied: "Hello?"

"Let me speak with Bill Akes, please."

"He's talkin'," the voice replied. "Who's this?"

"Inspector Holmes, homicide bureau," I lied blithely, trying to keep my voice sharp. "I've got a few questions to ask you, Akes, and if you don't answer them on the level, I'll have you picked up and charged with complicity in a murder."

"Murder?" Akes squealed. "What is this, inspector? I ain't been in no murder! I'm a peaceful man! I've been—"

"You take it easy," I snapped. "I'll ask the questions. In the first place, you read about the murder of Joe Simmons at the Jurark Theater, didn't you?"

The reply was long in coming and when it came it was very cautious. "Y-yeah?"

"You worked as a stagehand at the Jurark Theater until a week before the Thardo Cardena attraction opened. . . . Why'd you quit that job so suddenly, Akes?"

"I—I just quit."

"Got another job?"

"Yeah. Sure."

"Where?"

"Well—I ain't exactly got another job."

"Akes, I'm giving you your last chance. If you don't come clean on why you quit that job, you'll be arrested in half an hour."

Akes' voice became tinny. "Don't get huffy, Inspector. I'm goin' to tell you. I ain't evadin' the law. I told the guy I'd keep my mouth shut but that don't go for cops. I'm a peaceful man and I ain't gettin' mixed up in no murder."

"Why'd you quit?"

"Because this guy, he asks me to. Akes, he says, you quit your job and I'll slip you a century. So he hands me the bill and I go in and quit, and then he takes over the job. I wouldn't've done it only I needed that money bad."

"What was his name?"

"Quay," Bill Akes replied shakily. "Roy Quay."

I HUNG up without another word and then called Centre Street Police Headquarters and asked for Bill Hanley in the homicide bureau. He answered quickly in his brusque way: "Hiyuh, Daffy. Dinah said you'd call in the morning. Glad you buzzed. Glad you're home again. I've been needing you since—"

"Let me get a word in edgewise, Poppa, you handsome thing," I said. "How'd you like to break the Simmons case?"

"How would I like a million dollars?" he snorted in reply. "Are you kidding again, Daffy?"

"Not this time, Fido Vance. A red hot lead. This time it's a man with a name. Not easy, pal. You've got to tie him up with the thing and that's going to be harder than a Hollywood heart."

"Never mind the tying," Poppa roared. "I'm good at making knots. Who is the guy and how do I get him?"

"You get him at the Jurark Theater," I said. "Cardena and I are on our way there now. You'll get your man. And you can thank Cardena for a nice hunch on this thing. It's his inning."

"I'll see you at the Jurark in nothing flat," Poppa grunted and he hung up.

I put the telephone back on the desk and got up. "All right, Thardo," I said. "Let's take it on the lam. This is too good to keep. It might spoil. If Quay gets an idea we're after him, he's liable to light out and stay out for weeks."

"Righto," Cardena said.

We left the apartment and went downstairs. It was a cool night and darkness had just fallen. As a matter of fact, it really wasn't full dark yet. It was that transition stage, in between dusk and dark. The street lamps were on; the sky was purple, clay, and gray colored all at once.

"I'll call a cab," I said. "Wait a second. One'll be along in a minute."

We were at the curb.

"We could walk," Cardena said. "It's only a few blocks."

"Naw," said a new voice. "Let's ride, gents."

I went for my Colt corpse-maker as fast as I could because that voice tipped me off that we had stepped into a pot of quicksand. It was a taut, hard, brittle voice, and full of the business. I never even took a look at the guy who owned it. I wanted my rod and I wanted it fast.

I didn't get it.

The guy cracked my hand with his foot as I went for my hip and he damned near broke my wrist. Cardena cried out in surprise. Before I knew how, my gravescratcher was gone and some one lammed me across the back of the head with a gun butt.

I saw stars and I heard birdies sing but I didn't go out. I kept turning until I finally saw that there were two guys—not one like I'd thought. Those guys looked like Mutt and Jeff. One was a tall thin beanpole; the other was a sawed-off shrimp.

Cardena was grappling with the beanstalk. I took the shrimp. I could hardly see him through the spots which did a Fred Astaire across my eyes. I was woozier than a rubber cigar but I managed to plunk a solid jab in against the shrimp's ribs. I heard him grunt. It gave me a little satisfaction because it was the only blow I got in. He swung a lead frankfurter at me—a leather-hooded sap—and he caught me on the temple.

After that I lost interest in the whole thing.

IV

WHEN Cardena and I came to, we found ourselves back to back, each of us sitting in a ricketty chair, our hands cuffed. My right hand was cuffed to his left and his right to my left. We couldn't move much. Our feet were roped to the legs of the chairs. I couldn't see him either because our skulls were back to back, but that was all right. I knew he was there.

It was dark. We were in a big cellar, right in the middle of it. The place was lighted by a twenty-five watt bulb which hung in one of the farthest corners. It gave a scrawny emaciated kind of light, pale, washed-out. Darkness would have been better.

I said, "Thardo?"

Cardena didn't answer. He didn't respond at all. His body was limp against mine. I knew he had come to because I had heard him groan a little.

I hazarded he wasn't up to speaking yet. I let it pass.

IT MUST have been an hour or more later when the cellar door opened and a man came in. It was the beanstalk. I got a good look at him for the first time. His face drooped like a weeping willow and it had a nose that was long and hooked and angular with tremendous nostrils. His eyes were watery and very large. He walked so slowly, he appeared to shuffle, and he carried a .45 revolver at his side, swinging it lazily.

He came around and glanced down at me with a crooked smile and he grabbed me by the hair. I thought he was going to yank my head back but he was very gentle. He just lifted it until he could see my whole face better. The gentle gunman. Good headline.

"Howdy," he said. "Feelin' better?"

"Not a hell of a lot," I snapped. "You wouldn't feel so good with an egg on your head either. What's the idea?"

"Shucks," said the beanstalk, "don't go pullin' a sandy on me now, mister. Ain't gonna do you no good at this point. You're in the puddle and you know it."

"Maybe so," I said. "But I don't get the idea?"

"That shore was a purty corpse-maker you had this evenin'," he said. "Usta carry one like that myself when I was a hand at the old Scobee Ranch near Laramee. Ain't a nicer shooting iron in the business. I kinda assumed charge of yourn. You won't need it no more."

"You sound like the tall hay waving in the grassy valley," I replied acidly. He did. He had an accent you couldn't have gaffed with a meathook.

"Shucks," he said. "No use jokin', mister. You're plain and simple boot-hill bait right now. Your handle's Daffy Dill, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"The newspaper fella," he said. "I read a lot of yore stories. You write purty good."

"Thanks."

"Shame you had to go stick your head in this business. Now if you hadn't been with Mister Cardena tonight . . ."

"I'd live until morning, eh?"

"Shucks, Mister Dill, you wasn't supposed to be in it. Now they'll have to bump you off too. . . . Wait a minute. I got to look over your friend heah."

He was a character all right. He went around and shook Cardena a little, saw that Cardena was conscious. "Be back," he drawled laconically, and then he went out.

Cardena and I sat there another twenty minutes before the cellar door opened again. . . .

This time three men came in. The beanstalk was with them. The shrimp was the second man. And the third was a man I had never seen before. He was dressed in an expensive suit, his tie knotted with utmost precision, his nails manicured. Dapper Dan. A good-looking dark guy with a profile that would have bowled over a Hollywood screen test.

"Close the door," he said. "Is Quay coming?"

"He's coming," said the shrimp. "Just as soon as the stagehands are dismissed when this lug don't show up." He nodded toward Cardena. "Nice job, eh, boss?"

"A nice job," the boss said. "It'll be a nice job all the way." He smiled at me. "How do you do, Daffy?"

"I don't believe," I said nastily, "I've had the displeasure of meeting you."

"Quite right," he said. "Our ac-

quaintance will be brief at that. Permit me: I'm Dan Vermot."

"Vermin?" I said.

He smiled coldly and walked over to me. "Vermot," he said pleasantly and slammed his open hand across my face. The blow brought tears to my eyes.

"Lay off that stuff," the beanstalk said quickly and quietly, shuffling over toward me.

Vermot wheeled on him. "Are you telling me what to do?"

"I reckon so," said the beanstalk evenly. "I never could hit a man on the short end o' the stick. I'll kill this hombre easy and painless for you, but I don't stand for no slapping around when he ain't got a part in it nohow."

Vermot glared at the beanstalk and then backed away from me and went around to Cardena.

I said: "What is this anyhow? A freak show? You've got Dapper Dan, the minstrel man. And the lone hand from the lone prairee. And Bowery Bill there. What's on the make, boys?"

"Fifty thousand dollars," Vermot smiled coldly. "On the make, Daffy. And nothing is going to stand in the way."

"Don't give me your double-talk, skunk," I said. "What does it all add up to?"

"When Bernard Devoneaux died," Vermot said, "he left a twelve-word message which he wanted broken by spooks from the Great Beyond. If anyone could repeat that message, he'd be paid fifty grand. Well, Devoneaux didn't believe in ghosts, see? And he figured the fifty grand would keep forever. I don't believe in ghosts either, Daffy, but I'm going to get that fifty grand."

"Yeah?" I said. "How? With a lariat throwing ranch-hand like Jack the Beanstalk here?"

"Don't let the beanstalk fool you," Vermot said. "He happens to be a guy you've heard about before. His name is Cowboy Quick."

COWBOY Quick! I shut my mouth about the rangeland wisecracks right then and there. Everybody who read a newspaper knew about Cowboy Quick. He was wanted and wanted badly. Mostly for murder. The story ran that he had killed a cowhand in Wyoming and fled east. He'd known only two things: ranching and shooting. In Chi, he took up shooting as a muscle man for the Rachetti mob. When Rachetti was killed and the mob faded, Cowboy Quick had gone free-lancing. Always a step ahead of the FBI. His was a name which conjured up terror. He was a dead shot, could draw a gun faster than anyone who had ever drawn against him.

"Why, Mister Dill," Cowboy Quick drawled, his crooked smile pulling down his mouth, "you look kinda pale-like."

I backed down by just asking: "And how do you expect to break that message, Vermot?"

"Well," Vermot said slowly and easily, "I need a ghost in the first place. A ghost has got to give me that message." He turned and glanced at Cardena. "You'll make a very nice ghost, Cardena. You'll give me the message."

"You'll kill me first!" Cardena gasped.

"No," Vermot said. "Not first. Last . . ." He smiled. "Give, ghost, give. While you're still healthy. Torture isn't my racket, but if we have to . . ."

"Torture and be damned!" Cardena cried.

"Nice going," I said, admiring the magician's guts.

Cowboy Quick placed the barrel of his .45 across my mouth. "You ain't in

this, Mister Dill. Maybe you'd better be still. We got work to do here. Don't mind killin' you but I don't want to have to hurt you. Better be a good boy."

"But even if you get the message," I said, "it won't do you any good. Thardo Cardena has to O.K. it."

"He'll telephone," Vermot said, but you could see he didn't believe it and wouldn't take the chance on Cardena squealing.

"The hell I will!" Cardena said.

"Then we'll just manage it somehow," said Vermot. I got a little cold. I didn't like the way he said it. Plainly those boys had a way of collecting that money without Thardo Cardena's O.K. and that was bad because it meant that Cardena and I would probably take a slug in the back the minute the message became known.

"Last chance, ghost," Vermot told Cardena. "Are you going to give?"

"Not this side of hell," said Cardena savagely.

Vermot turned. He brushed a few invisible specks of dust from his suit and murmured: "Damp down here, isn't it? . . . I say, Pokey."

Bowery Bill, the shrimp, said: "Yeah, boss?"

"I think you'd better go upstairs and heat the iron. We'll give our ghost a taste of sole-burning and see if that can possibly persuade him to come across. . . . Incidentally, I forgot to introduce you two gentlemen to Pokey Anders here. As good a red hot iron burner as ever was born. Go ahead, Pokey. Get the iron."

"You can't do that to him!" I said hotly.

"Sorry, pardner," said Cowboy Quick, his face solemn. "But we got to learn that message."

Pokey Anders, his derby back on his moon-like head, went out the cellar door and up the stairs. He was gone a very short time. I figured they had had that iron going before they came down, knowing full well that Cardena wouldn't talk of his own accord.

WHEN he did come back, he carried a smoking soldering iron in his right hand. It was a big iron with a pyramid point and it glowed in the dullness of the cellar, little whisps of gray smoke curling up from its head.

"Going to talk?"

"No! No!"

"Take off his shoes, Cowboy," Vermot said. "Give him a taste of that on his bare feet, Pokey."

Cowboy Quick yanked off Cardena's shoes without untieing the laces, and stripped the black socks off after them. He stepped back. Pokey Anders came over with the iron and knelt down.

"Last chance, Cardena," Vermot smiled, leaning forward to push his polished face close against the magician's. "Last chance before pain. Come on, ghost. Be smart. Give."

Cardena shook his head wildly. I could feel it rock against my own.

"Give him the heat," Vermot snapped. "The damn fool!"

Cardena stiffened as the iron touched his sole. I couldn't see the actual job because my back was turned that way. And anyway, I didn't try to have a look. Cardena gritted his teeth, then he broke down and groaned horribly. "Talk" Vermot cried. "Talk! Don't let up on that iron till he talks, Pokey! Lay it onto him!"

Cardena went limp.

"He's out," said Cowboy Quick.

Vermot nodded. "Take it off, Pokey. Hell. He's got a lot of nerve. Go heat that iron again, Pokey. We'll let him rest and get all comfortable and then

we'll slap it on him again." He turned to me. "And you can tell him we'll burn his whole damn leg off if he doesn't come across. And maybe burn his eyes out. We're not fooling. We want those twelve words and we're in no particular mood to kid around."

They turned and went out, leaving the two of us alone again.

V

I NEVER felt lower in my whole life. Bound and handcuffed in the cellar of a house we had never seen, a house whose location we didn't know nor had the vaguest idea of, no possible means of escape, herded by three gunmen who tortured quicker than you could drop your hat. It was just impossible. I had been in lots of tight spots in my life but there had always been a loophole and somehow I'd squeaked out of them. Most of the past loopholes had been Poppa Hanley who always arrived in the moment when he was needed most badly.

No chance for Poppa Hanley here. If I didn't know where I was, how could *he?*

THE three bad boys had been gone for about a full minute when Thardo Cardena stirred and whispered: "Daffy?"

"I'm here," I said. "How do you feel, Thardo? You'd better give them the words—or even fake a message. They'll burn you up if you don't; they mean the works. Is your foot badly burned?"

He laughed coldly. "My foot hasn't got a mark on it."

A shiver went down my back and stayed there, studding me with little prickles of cactus and cutting my breath off short. "It hasn't—but how the hell . . ."

"We're going to beat them," Cardena said firmly. His voice was very strong. "We're going to beat them—by magic!"

"Magic?" I said. "Don't give me that. Magic is all hocus-pocus. It isn't on the level. You're supposed to be an escape artist. But you're still in that chair, aren't you?"

"That may be," he said evenly, "but my feet aren't tied now and yours still are. Sure, it is hocus-pocus. But it goes a long way. I told you tonight that when I came to your apartment I was all ready to go to the theater. That meant that I was carrying full equipment for all my tricks—my escapes and my fire-walking act. These men only patted my pockets for a gun. They didn't search me thoroughly. And I still have that equipment!"

"But your feet?"

"I do a fire-walking act every night, Daffy," he said. "I walk through a bed of hot coals in the manner of the Hindu fakirs. It's just a trick. I learned it from the old fire-walkers of the past, the mystics, the Fijis. My feet have been treated, and my hands too. The formula is simple enough. I can't be burned unless the application is washed off."

"Well, brush my teeth!" I gasped. "The day of miracles! How do we get out of here now?"

"Here goes," he said. "Can you see the handcuffs from where you are?"

"Yeah."

"Are they police regulation?"

"They're the same nippers the cops use, if that's what you mean."

"That's exactly what I mean." He rose from the chair, his feet entirely unbound and twisted around toward me. He got down on his knees so that his mouth was close to my feet. "Sit still. I'll cut your ropes."

I sat still. In three seconds I could move my feet again. "For Pete's sake, how do you do it?"

"Three razor blades. Always carry them. One on the lapel where I can reach it with my mouth. I just used that one to cut yours. The other two are hidden. One on the vest in case my hands are tied in front of me. The other in my trouser cuff. The last two are set right in and you have to saw with either the vest or the cuff. Stand up."

I stood up. We were still back to back, handcuffed.

"All right," he said. "Now listen. I'm going to sit down. You too. Then I'll work my head under you and you try to roll over my face. Never mind if you hurt me with your weight. You just get over my face. Do a sort of somersault on top of me. Understand?"

"Yowzuh. Let's go."

We did it. I worked myself over on top of him and suddenly the cuffs slipped around on our wrists and we stood up face to face but still cuffed.

"Eureka!" I said. "Boy, you're wonderful. Can you get these cuffs off?"

"Of course," he scoffed. "Haven't you ever seen my handcuff escape?"

"Sure," I said, "but this happens to be the real thing."

"No difference at all. Watch." He held up his left foot and scraped at the flesh with a finger nail. The flesh suddenly came away. It wasn't flesh at all. It was flat wax colored with flesh grease paint. He picked up the flattened cake of wax and broke it. A key was stuck in the wax. He took the key, inserted it in the cuff lock and clicked it. In a few seconds, the cuffs were off.

I TOOK a deep breath. "Well, this is a revelation. I always figured you boys got out of these by being contortionists. It's a disappointment to see you have to use a key."

"Don't have to," Cardena explained. "It's safest. I usually carry a small lead plate against my knee beneath my trouser leg. You can open any cuff by cracking it sharply against the lead plate. But that doesn't *always* work, which is why the key."

We caught our breath and took a look around. Things still weren't so hot. There seemed to be one way out of the cellar: the door which our captors had taken. That wasn't a healthy route. I had no hankering to try it unarmed.

"There's a coal chute," Cardena said.

We went over. The coal chute went up to a window, small and narrow and just about big enough to let a man's body pass through. We took it for granted that the window opened onto the street level. But it wasn't actually a window: it was a piece of plank. And what's more it was locked on the street side, with a padlock as we learned later.

"No go," I said. "Couldn't break it without a lot of noise and those bohunks would be on our necks in a second."

"Wrong," said Cardena. "I can open that from the inside. Climb up there with me."

I climbed up to the top of the chute and waited for him. His hands flew into the tails of his full dress suit and came out with a pair of gadgets that looked like nothing human. They were very light. "Aluminum," he said. "Perfect thing of its kind. Small. Unobtrusive. I'm about to give away another of my tricks, Daffy. This is nothing more than a lightweight automobile jack."

"Holy Smoke," I breathed. "Do you have a bathtub on you?"

He smiled. "Not quite. This jack is the secret of my escape from the

milk can under the cake of ice. You recall, there was no bottom to the milk can? Well, under there, I set this jack in motion. It lifts both can and ice up from the floor enough so that I can crawl out. Then I take a loose plank from my platform, brace the can and ice up, take out the jack, pull the plank allowing the can and ice to fall to the floor again, replace plank in platform: and there I am, escaped."

"How are you going to use it now?"

For answer, he set the jack against the side of the window sill so that its top pressed against the plank which served as window for the coal chute. He began to revolve the handle and the piston part of the jack, worked by its thread from the threaded wheel below, began to rise, pressing hard against the wood. It was a test of strength: the jack or the plank and its padlock. There was only one result possible.

When the pressure on the plank from the jack got too strong the padlock outside burst all to hell and the plank hung loosely. We had an open way out.

"Go first," Cardena said, breathing heavily. "You're a lot younger than I am. You can help me out."

"Right."

I clambered out the window, pushing the plank outward with my skull. I came out right on pavement. When I got out there, I turned around to help Cardena out and I heard voices suddenly. From the cellar. For one instant I saw Cardena's white face, pallid and taut as he struggled at the window. Then hands pulled him back and he yelled: "Run, Daffy, run! Get the police! Hurry!"

It was tough luck after all his hard work. But those ginzos had come back to the cellar just in time to grab him.

I took it on the lam.

VI

I WAS a block and a half away when I decided to come back. The house where we had been imprisoned, incidentally, was on Forty-Ninth Street just past Third Avenue.

I went back because I'd done some thinking and it all added up to this: by the time I got a cop and went back to a one-sided gun battle, anything might have happened. In the first place, those boys weren't going to stick around that place now that I had gone. They'd take a powder and take Cardena with them. That was the only thing to do. And if I didn't go back, no one on earth would know where Thardo Cardena had disappeared to.

So I went back.

I hailed a cab and told him to park on Third Avenue under the El structure where I could see the house plainly. Then we waited. And not long either.

Inside of five minutes, they all hauled out. I made out Cowboy Quick's lean figure in the lead. Then Vermot and Cardena who was playing ball and making no breaks. Then Pokey Anders and a fourth man whom I guessed to be Roy Quay, having arrived while we were getting out of there.

They got into a big sedan. Pokey Anders drove. I tapped my driver's shoulder, pointed out the car and said: "Tail it. But do it right, friend. You're saving a man's life."

We followed them up First Avenue finally until we reached One Hundred and Fifth Street where they pulled over to the curb in front of a little brick veneer dump, three stories high and ten feet wide. They got out—all of them—and went in, leaving the car there.

"The nearest telephone booth," I said.

We found one down the block. I paid off the driver and thanked him and I went in and called Centre Street and asked for Lieutenant William Hanley.

"Not here," was the reply.

"Give me radio sixty-seven then," I snapped. "And fast!"

"Radio sixty-seven!" a voice said almost immediately.

"Get this," I said. "It's important. This is Daffy Dill, New York *Chronicle*. I've got to reach Poppa—I mean Bill Hanley. It's murder and extortion and time is important. Call him on the air and tell him to come ahell and high leather for First and One Hundred and Fifth. I'll be on the corner. He'll recognize me. Got it?"

"Got it," said the voice. "He'll be there, Daffy."

"Who is this, Mike Grady?"

"Yeah. I'll send him pronto."

"Thanks, Mike." I hung up.

I cut back to First Avenue and went down the block in the shadow until I reached the car Pokey Anders had driven. The lights were on in the house and I knew some one would be keeping a watch, but I had to take the risk. I kept to the shadow side of the car and let the air out of the front and rear tires there. The car leaned.

Then I went back to the corner to wait for Poppa.

It was some wait.

HE TOOK a long time. I thought he'd never get there. I waited impatiently and the minutes ticked off. Thirty-two of them had gone forever before the black prowl car came cutting across from Fifth Avenue, made me out on the corner in its headlight glare, and pulled to a stop beside me.

Poppa Hanley was out of the buggy in a flash and his first words were: "Where's Cardena? Hell's popping. He didn't show up at the Jurark tonight and neither did you. We thought—"

"Wait a minute, Poppa," I said.

He stopped. "Yeah, Daffy. Sorry. I'm nervous. This damned Simmons thing has got my nanny."

"Your man is Roy Quay," I said. "He speared Joe Simmons under the Jurark stage. I don't know why yet. I think I do though. We'll find out tonight."

"Hmm," Poppa grunted. "Quay, eh? The guy with the white streak in his hair. And what's the racket? Where's Cardena? What happened to you? You've got coal on your face."

I spilled. I told him the whole business. His face got very grim and set and he was ready to break a bunch of heads. "All right," he said when I finished. "This is all washed up." He leaned back into the car. "Claghorn. Babcock."

His two scentless bloodhounds climbed out. "Yeah, chief?"

"Come on. Do as you're told. Guns out. See if we can't take these punks without firing and bring hell down the block. See that house? Each of you take either side of the door. Daffy, you and I will get behind the car. If what you told me is on the level, Cardena is in no danger. They won't kill him until they've made sure the message he gives them is on the level. They'll squeeze him maybe, but if he's smart he'll spill the message and to hell with it. I'm not going in there because I don't know that house and I don't want to get my men killed. This will work right. It always has. Let's sit tight."

We took up the watch. . . . At a little past midnight, we heard sounds beyond the door. Hanley muttered: "Here they come. Handle it right, boys." The door opened.

Thardo Cardena walked out first and

went right to the car. Behind him came Pokey Anders and a man with a white streak through the hair of his head: Roy Quay.

"Take 'em," Hanley clipped.

At the sound of his voice, the men came to a dead stop, startled out of their pants. Detective Babcock took Anders with a punch in the jaw that could have been heard half a block away. He socked Anders in against the house and knocked his derby off, and Anders laid still without a murmur, ice-cold on the pavement.

Claghorn tried to take Quay but the guy was fast. He squirmed around and he got a gun out. Hanley came up behind him fast and rabbit-punched behind the ear with his right while he twisted the gun wrist away with his left.

Quay grunted and fell on his face. His nose bled from the impact and he dropped the gun.

"Thardo," I cried, running toward Cardena, "did they—"

Cardena had a gun too. He pulled it right on my stomach as I went toward him and I instinctively bent double and tackled him above the knees with everything I had. We both went down, grunting. And suddenly he stopped struggling as I heard a *thwack*. I got up. Poppa Hanley had hit him with the butt end of Quay's gun. He shook his head and looked disgusted. "Fine people you go around with," he said. "How many more inside?"

"Two," I said, puzzled and panting. "Vermot and Cowboy Quick."

"Cowboy Quick!" Hanley said. His voice was even, hard. His eyes narrowed and his face muscles rippled. "You guys stay out. I'll go in. Keep away from the door in case a slug—"

"I'm with you," I said. "Hand me Quay's rod."

"Okay, Daffy," Poppa said. He hit my shoulder. "Thanks."

WE OPENED the door and went in. There were lights inside in the hall and a narrow little staircase which went up to the second floor. We looked up the stairs and we came to a dead halt.

Cowboy Quick's rangy figure was at the head of the stairs. His hands were hanging loosely at his sides and his knees were bent slightly, and he was smiling enigmatically. A strange sort of guy. I've never figured him out.

"Halt there, gents," he said. His eyes were fixed on Poppa Hanley. "I ain't never shot down a man in cold blood yet. I reckon I'll keep my record clean. You, mister—" he meant Hanley who had not drawn his gun yet—"you mister, draw!"

Hanley met Quick's eyes, waited a second, then took up the challenge. They both went for their guns at the same time. The shots were almost simultaneous, but not quite. The smoke filled up that hallway with a bitter biting smell. Then a body was at our feet, having tumbled down the narrow staircase. Hanley turned it over. Cowboy Quick couldn't see. The glaze of death was already in his eyes. There was a bullet wound so close to the heart, it wasn't even a matter of seconds. His lips moved. He gasped: "Nice—drawin'—pardner—" and he died.

Just like that.

Hanley put him down and went up the stairs. I followed him. We went into the first room at the top of the landing, looking for Vermot. We didn't find him.

Thardo Cardena was on the bed!

He was unconscious, moaning and groaning and talking in his sleep. I

went over with Poppa and we listened. "I'll tell. . . . This is the truth. . . . the message . . . the twelve-word message . . . silly isn't it? . . . Just a silly little phrase. . . . but no one could guess it in a million years . . . only a ghost could come back and tell it . . . the message? . . yes, I'll tell the twelve-word message . . it's the truth . . . *Tom, Tom, the piper's son, stole a pig and away he run* . . . it is, it is, I swear it is the truth. Devoneaux wrote that himself. . . . He had a sense of humor yes . . ."

"For pete's sake," I gasped, "what is this? He's here and he's downstairs! And what's wrong with him?"

"This is the real Thardo Cardena," said Poppa Hanley. "Take a look at this stuff."

I looked. There was a hypodermic needle on the table along with a drug named scopolamine.

"Truth serum," said Poppa. "And damned dangerous stuff. He wouldn't spill of his own accord so they pumped this into him and then questioned him in a subconscious state where he couldn't lie. You'd better phone for a medico pronto, Daffy. This can be fatal."

"But the guy downstairs," I said. "Then he must be— That was Dan Vermot downstairs. I see the lay now! No wonder he wasn't worried about Cardena okaying the message through to the Magicians' Society. Vermot was going to *be* Cardena, was going to okay one of his own men, probably Pokey Anders. I'll bet they were leaving for Chicago tonight to present the claim for the money. And Cowboy Quick was to finish off Cardena when the mazuma was collected!"

"You call a doctor," said Hanley. "That sum-up solves the case."

When I got down in the street, Detective Babcock grabbed me and said: "Where's Hanley? This guy has talked." He meant Roy Quay. "A couple in the body and he was ready to rave. He says he killed Simmons all right, jabbing the guy with a spear in the stage basement."

"Why?" I said. "Why?"

"They tried to make Simmons slip Cardena the dope to make him talk. Some kind of serum. They wanted Simmons to get the twelve-word message out of Cardena. Simmons refused. They had to bump him to shut him up or he would have tipped off Cardena."

I nodded and then ran down the block to the drug store. I told the pharmacist and he called from one booth for a doctor and I got in the other and called the *Chronicle*. To my surprise, the Old Man answered. He should have been home in bed. This was the lobster watch. I covered my consternation and I shouted: "Break down that front page for tomorrow, yokel, because I'm filing a story right now that'll knock your eye-teeth out. Here's your headline—right across the colyums—get this: *Thardo Cardena Informs Chronicle of Ghost Message to Thwart Killers. . . .*" And then I talked and talked and told him what had happened.

I wasn't half through when he said: "Listen, Daffy, don't bother me with this small change stuff. And you don't need a rewrite man for it. You come in and write the yarn yourself tomorrow. We can't be headlining that story now. It's not big enough!"

"Not big enough?" I shouted. "Why, you damned gnome, it's the Simmons murder, ghosts, gangsters, the capture of Cowboy Quick, and everything else all rolled up into one! And you say it's not big enough!"

"Not tonight it isn't," snapped the Old Man. "Now lay off this wire and

keep it clear because I'm busier than hell."

"What story could be bigger than that tonight?" I raved.

"Listen, Daffy," the Old Man replied kind of quietly, "the dirigible *Hindenburg* exploded at Lakehurst tonight at seven twenty P. M. Burned in twenty seconds. Thirty-three dead so far."

"The *Hindenburg,*" I said in a small voice. "Oh."

That's the kind of thing that happened. All that work, all that risk, all those chances, nine lives all mixed up in each other for a brief moment, and the story goes on page three.

The breaks.

I sighed and hung up, and I went out and walked back to the little house on First Avenue, wondering vaguely what I stayed in the screwy racket for anyhow.

The Author

Richard Sale says:

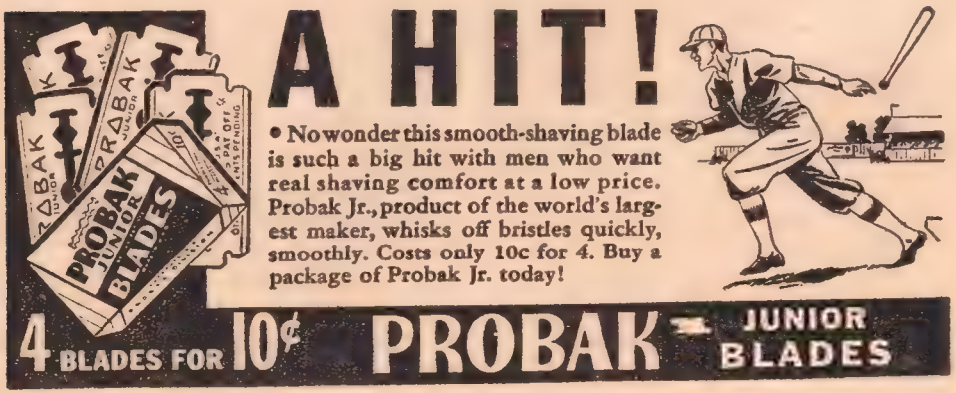
"Went to Washington and Lee University, and began my professional writing days there. Married Arline Walker while I was a sophomore. That was five years ago. I am now the proud father—and I mean *proud*—of an eight months old daughter, Lindsey, who delights my heart by making passes at my typewriter.

"I was a cub reporter on the Pelham, N. Y., *Sun* for a few years, and got most of my newspaper experience—if you can call it such—there. Thus was Daffy Dill born.

"Am a man of many hobbies and devote more time to them than I should. I am an ardent model railroad fan and am now third owner of a fine little railroad. Also like photography. Had done little of it until Lindsey made her arrival. Taking pictures of her made me camera conscious and I went into it further, including motion pictures. Thus was Candid Jones born.

"Have authored two novels: *Not Too Narrow, Not Too Deep,* published in this country by Simon & Schuster and soon to be made into a motion picture by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer; *Is a Ship Burning?* to be published this spring in London by Cassell, Ltd. A third, *Monday Island,* is in the works.

"Have traveled the country a bit from New York to Miami to Hollywood. Speaking of Hollywood: I now have a movie playing the theaters entitled *Find the Witness,* which was originally a Daffy Dill story called *A Slug for Cleopatra.*"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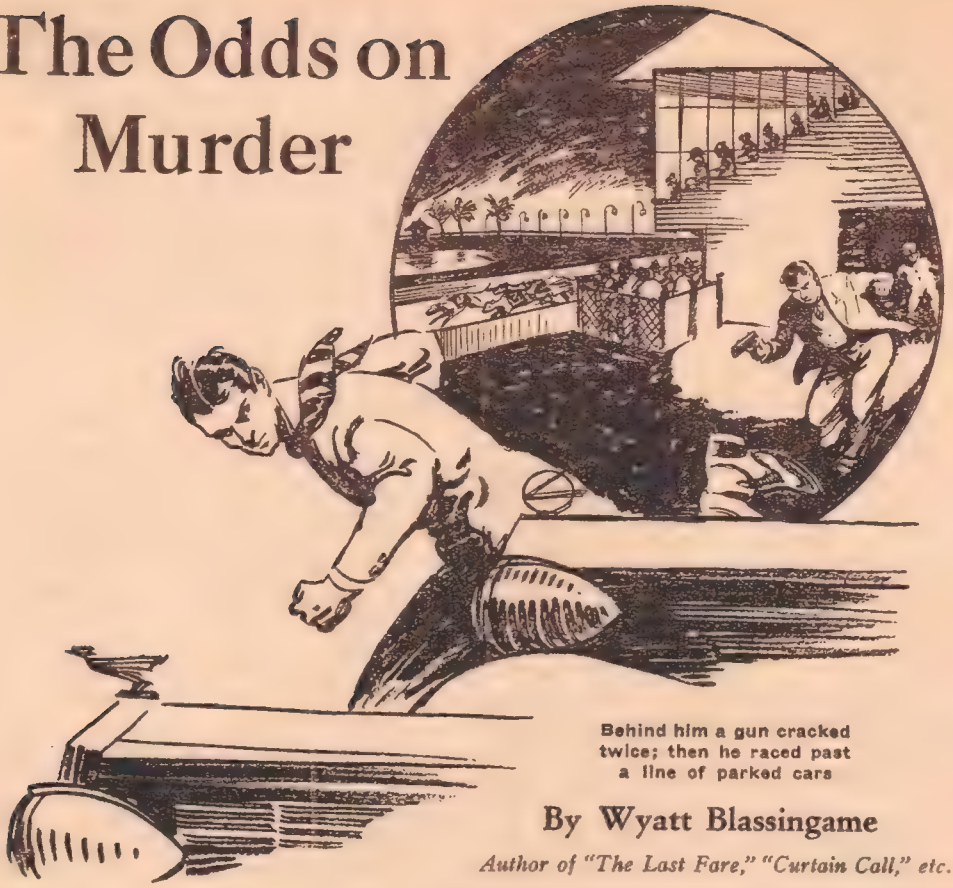

Behind him a gun cracked twice; then he raced past a line of parked cars

By Wyatt Blassingame

Author of "The Last Fare," "Curtain Call," etc.

Limitless Dean Was a Gambling Man, and He Bet His Life on a Wild Hunch

A FULL moon hung just above the cabbage palms, but its light was lost in the glare of electricity. To the left was the grandstand with the parimutuel windows underneath, and to the right was the paddock. Crowds bustled back and forth, trying to get a look at the dogs before laying bets. There was the loud clatter of voices.

"Little Margaret in the third didn't . . ."

"Program here. Fifteen cents."

"Hell, we better get to the paddock if . . ."

"And I said, 'Listen, Mister. You'll have to be introduced to me formal before . . .'"

And through it all, from the lockout kennels beyond the paddock, came the steady baying of dogs.

The races were well under way when Limitless Dean came through the gates. He paused for a minute listening, catching all the sounds of the place, photographing it on his brain without seeming to move even his eyes. "It's not much different from a horse track," he thought, "except horses don't make so much noise."

He knew horses. He'd played them from Santa Anita to Jamaica, from Saratoga to Hialeah. Sometimes he

was worth a hundred grand, and sometimes he was flat—if you could really say that Limitless Dean was ever broke, because his credit was good. With the gambling gentry he had a name for honesty. He could borrow a thousand, or five thousand, on the collateral of his promise. What amazed other gamblers was that Dean often preferred to work. "Working a while makes me enjoy leisure more," he said. He was a good newspaperman and could usually pick up a job without trouble.

He expected to need one soon. The horses at Hialeah had cleaned him. He hadn't taken in the Miami dog track, but had wandered across the state to this Gulf Coast city. With his last fifty dollars he was visiting his first dog race, and fifty dollars wasn't enough to give Limitless Dean much entertainment. He had expensive tastes. He wanted more money or none. The thing he did now was entirely characteristic.

He bought a program, riffled the pages and looked at a restaurant advertisement that included the phone number. The last numeral was five. "That's my dog," he said, and looked for another phone number. It began with two. At the pari-mutuel window he laid fifty dollars on dog number five to place.

He was turning away when a voice said, "Hello, Limitless. Did they run you out of Miami with the other cheap crooks?"

Dean stopped, flatfooted, moving his head slowly. The man who faced him was tall as he was, and heavier in the waist and chest. He had a square hard face with pale cheeks that looked as if he'd spent most of his life under artificial light. His eyes were pale blue.

Dean said, "Hello, Russell." He did not change expression, did not take his eyes from those of the other man. "Don't call me a cheap crook," Dean said slowly. "I don't like to be mentioned in the same breath with your type." He stood unmoving, expressionless, giving Russell a chance to do more than sputter and turn red with fury. When he didn't, Dean heeled and went toward the track.

IT was a quarter mile oval with a lake in the infield that caught the circling lights and the moon. White starting boxes were at the quarter, the futurity, and the five-sixteenth. The judges' stand, done in white and green, was on the infield close against the lake. In the grandstand, a girls' orchestra was blaring about *This Year's Crop of Kisses,* but the crowd was interested in more important matters.

The dogs came onto the track led on leashes by their handlers. In front was a scrawny, monkey-faced man carrying a baton and stepping like a drum major. His costume was even more gorgeous than that of the handlers, who wore white trousers, silk scarlet shirts, and green arm bands which sported the number of the dog they handled.

The drum major presented the commissioner's permit to the judges, marched on past toward the futurity post. A loud-speaker's metal voice said, "Two minutes to lay your bets. Two minutes to lay your bets."

As the grayhounds came past him Dean saw his dog for the first time. She was a small brindle bitch who wouldn't weigh more than fifty pounds, but her chest was deep and he liked the way she carried her head. He checked on her name in the program. Weary Woman.

The dogs were put in their boxes with much pomp and howling, the handlers having to lift some of them bodily and toss them in. Once inside and the doors lowered, they were completely hidden. The handlers lined up in a column of twos, the monkey-faced drum major in the lead, and went trotting back toward the paddock. They passed so close to Dean, leaning against the rail, he could have touched them.

The judge turned and waved at the rabbit-pusher on the far side of the track. The rabbit-pusher gave the mechanical rabbit a shove and climbed the rail to the infield. The rabbit made a whirring noise, picking up speed. The dogs were yelping and jarring against the wooden sides of the boxes. But for the first time the crowd was silent, tense as though one collective monstrous breath was being held for the start.

Limitless Dean had gambled all his life because he liked to gamble. He enjoyed it even when he lost, yet now his face did not change except to grow slightly darker with blood. Looking at him, a person could not have told whether his upper lip set naturally crooked on the lower one or whether he was grinning a faint, half-amused, half-bitter smile. The dark quiet eyes showed nothing. The whole angular face might have been cut from wood.

The rabbit shot past the post. The starter, who had stood with his back to the approaching rabbit, caught him out of the corner of his eye and pulled the lever, flapping back all doors together. The dogs catapulted out.

Weary Woman was running in fourth place as she passed Dean. Out front was a big white dog, the numeral 3 hardly visible as he flashed past. Bunched behind him, came a couple who led Weary Woman by half a length.

On the far side of the track it was difficult to see which dog was which. A dog wearing green was moving up, but Dean couldn't be certain if it was his. Then the big white out front began to shake his head as though tiring and a dog went past him, then another.

THEY whipped past Dean and it was over. Weary Woman ran second by a length. A curtain slid across the track behind the rabbit, and the dogs pulled up, baffled and baying. The handlers ran out to catch them.

Dean let the long breath slide from his nostrils. The race had been more exciting than he expected. The speed of those dogs seemed incredible.

Standing in line before a mutuel window, Dean noticed that the betting was not particularly heavy. But he'd heard that dog racing was one of the trickiest of sports, it being particularly impossible to even guess what a dog was going to do. And there were ten races on the program, so the average citizen couldn't go down the line too heavily.

He collected $5.10 on each two dollar place ticket and turned away.

A girl put a hand on his arm. "Hold it, Limitless. I was waiting for you."

"Yes?"

She was pretty, what was visible through the make-up, but even cosmetics couldn't change the hard set of her chin, the bold gaze of her eyes. She looked like a girl who'd been around long enough to learn all she was capable of learning. Dean knew he'd seen her, but couldn't remember where.

She let her hand slide down his arm, touch his hand and close on it. "Come on," she said. "I want to talk." She pulled him toward the deserted end of a corridor.

He said, "I'm going over to the paddock to see the dogs. I'm in a hurry."

She said, "Not too big a hurry to talk to me. Not tonight, Sweetheart," and pulled on his hand again.

For a moment he stood looking down at her, that curious crooked smile on his lips, his dark eyes empty. Then he said, "Okay. What is it?"

"Out here."

There were no lights where she took him, only a semi-dark space between the grandstand and a white wire fence ten yards ahead.

Dean put his back to the grandstand. He didn't know what her game was, but once he'd been knocked over the head and robbed, and he wasn't slow at learning.

She said, "So that's how you're working it now, Limitless. I thought you were big time."

"I'm playing the dogs," he said.

She leered at him. "Not big money, huh, but steady. How'd you get *that* started?"

Dean said, "I think we're on different tracks, but it doesn't matter. I'm going to the paddock before the dogs run."

"Wait a minute!" she said and snatched his arm. "Don't try giving me the pass. I saw what happened. And I'm Harry Conner's friend. How'd you like for Harry to know what I saw?"

"I'd like it," Dean said. "I'd like it swell. Personally I'm not interested." He pushed her aside, seemingly gentle, yet her hands tore loose from his arm and she staggered. He started for the corridor.

"Damn you!" she screamed. "I'll see that—" Her voice stopped on a surprised, quavering note, hung for a moment, changed into a thoaty gurgle, and faded. There was the thud of a body on sand.

Dean turned and saw the girl lying at the back corner of the grandstand, face down. The corner of his mouth jerked slightly, making his grin more crooked than ever. He'd seen women pull that fainting stunt before.

He was moving away when the gleam of light caught his eye and checked him. For a moment he stood there, raised on the balls of his feet, half turned. The muscles of his face seemed to harden, to petrify. Slowly he went back toward the girl.

SHE was lying face down in the sand, both hands pulled up toward her spine. But the knife was under her left shoulder blade and she'd never touched it. It was a pocket knife, slightly larger than the average, with a spring blade. He could tell that, even in the semi-darkness. It was driven to the hilt in the girl's body, pinning the dress tight against her. On the cloth a dark stain widened slowly.

Dean knelt but didn't touch her. He looked close to make sure the knife had got under the shoulder blade. It had. The girl had been dead when she struck the ground.

Still kneeling, he let his gaze move slowly. To the right there was empty space between him and the white wire fence. Not even a palmetto that a person could hide behind. Above him was the grandstand, more than twenty feet high back here. And to the left the flank rear of the grandstand ran for some hundred odd feet to where the crowd came pouring from the other end to fill the space between there and the paddock. A person could have reached the crowd before Dean got to the corner of the stand, but he would have needed to sprint. Still, there was no other place the murderer could have come from.

Dean stood up, hesitating a moment. He didn't want to get in trouble, yet the killing should be reported. And then, as he took his first step toward the corridor underneath the grandstand, two men came out of it. They came running, and one of them carried a gun.

One yelled, "That's him!" and the man with the gun skidded to a halt. He wasn't big, but he was big enough to hold the .45 in his hand very steady. It was pointed squarely at Dean.

The man said, "Hold it, Pal. And get your hands up."

The other man came closer, keeping well out of the line of fire. His square, pale face was nasty with his smile. His pale eyes glittered. He said, "So you've taken up murder now, Limitless? And caught right at it. That'll be the chair for you."

It was Bill Russell, the man Dean had spoken to earlier that night.

BILL RUSSELL was a politician. At a party in Miami three years before Russell's girl friend, on the outside of enough liquor not to care about appearances, had fallen for the tall, cynical-faced gambler, and had made the fact plain to everybody, including Russell. The politician had lost his temper, jumped Dean, and got beaten up. After that he had taken to betting against the other man, and had consistently lost.

The two faced each other in the office of the racing commissioner behind the paddock. Three other men were in the office—Commissioner Tompkins and two track guards, one of them the little man who'd arrested Dean.

"I saw him go back there with the woman," Russell said. "When they didn't come back I knew something was happening and I looked. He'd just stuck the knife in her and was kneeling beside the body, probably trying to steal her purse. Brady—" he gestured toward the little guard—"was close by and I called him, told him what I'd seen."

Dean's face had the dark look it had worn as he watched the race. The nostrils were imperceptibly flared, the mouth either set a little crooked naturally or bent in a slight, cynical grin. The dark eyes were expressionless. "So you're going to be personally responsible for my execution?" he said. "You're going to swear you saw me kill her?"

Russell hesitated. "I didn't see the actual murder," he said at last. "But I saw enough to know you did it. And I don't think you'll get away this time."

"Not if you can help it," Dean said. He knew that Russell had power in this county and would use it. The police would accept the case as closed. There'd be no real investigation. And Limitless Dean, who had nothing except the friendship of gamblers to back him, would go to the chair.

"How about a motive?" he said. "I didn't even know the girl."

Russell hit the Commissioner on the shoulder. "Listen at that," he yelled. "He didn't know her. He didn't know Race Cardoni at Hialeah, I reckon? He didn't know Cardoni's girl?"

Dean remembered then. He'd seen the woman around with Cardoni occasionally, but he hadn't known Cardoni well, hadn't even known the girl's name. Still, Russell would see to it that the police found a motive somewhere in the past, even if Russell had to manufacture it.

"You seem to have known her," Dean said. "Maybe you killed her."

The politician rocked on his heels

and laughed. "I was in the grandstand, right at the steps, with Brady and some girls when I saw you and the skirt go outside. I'd been there since the race. I wasn't out of sight more than three seconds, just long enough to walk to the door, then call Brady."

"That's right," the track guard said. "We were talkin' to the girls in the band. Mr. Russell couldn't have got to the body, no less do the killin' and get back."

"She was going with Harry Conner lately," Russell said. "They claim Harry planned to marry her. He's on the racing commission, Limitless, in case you don't know. I expect he'll put some pressure on the police to see you don't skip the chair."

Dean didn't answer. He stood listening to the ceaseless barking of the dogs from the lock-out kennels behind the paddock, thinking there wouldn't be any need of both politicians working against him. Russell's influence would be enough to cinch the case, but with two political powers opposed to him he wouldn't have a chance to stop short of the chair.

"I've telephoned the Sheriff's office," Commissioner Tompkins said. "They should be here any minute now."

ONCE behind the bars Dean's case would be hopeless, and he knew it. If the real murderer was discovered, Dean would have to discover him, and he couldn't do it from a jail cell. He let his gaze rove the room although even his eyes did not seem to move: the trick of a poker player, blank-faced, watching his opponents. One of the guards was near the door, his gun in his pocket. Brady, the little guard, stood close to Dean on the right. He too had his gun in his pocket, his hand resting on it. The racing commissioner was behind his desk and probably unarmed. Russell was standing beside him. The sound of barking dogs drifted constantly through the room.

Dean turned to the little guard, said, "You got a cigaret? I'm out."

"Sure." Brady pulled a pack from the pocket in which he carried his gun.

Dean said, "Thanks." Then as he reached for it he said sharply, "Listen at those dogs! Something's wrong out there!"

Unconsciously each man tilted his head, listening. The guard at the door turned half around.

Dean moved fast. He put his right foot behind Brady, struck him a back hand blow with the heel of his fist full in the mouth. Brady staggered, stumbled over Dean's foot and went down with a crash. Dean dived headlong at the other guard.

The man whirled, got his hand in his pocket. But he didn't get it out. With all the force of his dive Dean struck him just over the belt buckle. The guard doubled like a jackknife and went down on the top of his head and his knees. Russell was leaping for him when Dean got the door open. He slammed it back into the big man's face, hard.

Then he was outside. Two or three persons stared at him as he went over the low rail, but almost before the sound of shouting came from the paddock he was lost in the crowd.

He did not go toward the gate. Instead he doubled back and lost himself in the throng around the paddock itself. There had been no disturbance at his arrest and few people even knew of the murder. He watched Russell and the two guards come rushing out of the paddock and head for the gate. "Let 'em go," he thought. They'd look for him everywhere except here.

And Dean was certain that the solution to the murder lay here at the track. He kept remembering what the girl had said, "How'd you like for Harry to know what I saw?"

Dean hadn't been interested then, but his life depended on it now. He had to know who killed her, had to get absolute proof. And he had to do it alone.

There was a low platform just outside the paddock building with eight open stalls. Two races had been run while Dean was in the commissioner's office and now the dogs for the seventh were being brought out by the handlers. They were placed on scales, weighed, the weights posted and the dogs paraded three times around a small inclosure. Dean was more interested now in the handlers than in the dogs themselves. They were all young men, in their middle twenties.

AFTER limbering up, the dogs were placed on the platform. The commissioner examined each dog, rubbing head and throat. When he nodded okay the handler put on the racing colors and the muzzle. The dogs were led off toward the track.

"I can't watch them run without some money on them," Dean thought. "I've never watched a race and not bet on it."

He didn't know anything about dogs and they'd all looked pretty coming out. He wouldn't overdo his phone number luck. He picked this one from the records in the program. A novice could never have made first base from the wild jumble of numerals and letters; Dean's eyes swept over them easily.

Black Boy, he figured, should be the favorite, and a glance at the probable odds board proved him right. He picked a dog named Trumpet, a steady but never brilliant runner.

The windows were almost deserted when he put down fifty on Trumpet to show. The clerk, a pink-cheeked, moon-faced man, looked at him surprised. "You're sure that's what you want, sir?"

"I won't be sure until after the race," Dean said. "You just give me the tickets."

He got to the rail just as the handlers lined up and started trotting back to the paddock. The dogs were baying and battering themselves against the boxes. The handlers trotted past.

The judge was waving at the rabbit-pusher when Dean noticed the tiny circular spot on the rail between his hands. He didn't see the rabbit start, didn't hear the *whirr* of accelerating machinery. He stood there, head bent, staring at the small dot on the rail between his hands.

He moved his right hand, touched the spot with his forefinger. It was wet, and when he moved the finger there was the dull stain of blood on the tip.

He'd slid his hands along that rail only a few seconds before and blood hadn't been there. He felt the muscles in his jaw harden, stretch tight against the skin. The crooked smile deepened slightly.

But he was watching the starting boxes as the rabbit flashed past and the boxes opened. Trumpet was running from number three. He broke from the box as though shot from it, flashing past Dean in first place, moving so fast that it seemed impossible he could keep his legs under him. At the first curve he was two lengths in the lead and drawing away on the far stretch.

At the three sixteenths, however, he began to fade. Black Boy, the favorite,

a large black dog that seemed to run with no more effort than the rabbit, began to move up. They flashed past Dean almost even, but with Trumpet still running with that appearance of being shot from a catapult, his body seeming to move faster than his legs.

And then the race was over with Trumpet out front, paying forty-eight dollars to win. The show odds were only three-eighty on a two-dollar ticket.

Dean looked at the board much longer than was necessary to see what was posted. He was whistling from the crooked side of his grin. For a moment he studied his finger with the blood spotted tip. Then he headed for the board underneath the grandstand where the results of all the races were posted. He studied it for several minutes, checking the winning dogs against their past performances listed in the program.

"That's the way it is," he thought. "It's got to be that way. The State does everything possible to prevent a race being fixed. The dogs are kept in lock-out kennels for hours before the race; they're examined twice; paraded for the public. That's the only way it could be worked. But one more race and I'll be certain."

HE was half way to the paddock when it happened. There were persons to right and left—he'd kept constantly surrounded by people—the chatter of voices, the baying of dogs. There was no way to distinguish one set of footsteps behind him from any other.

He was totally unprepared. The blow smashed against the back of his skull, hurled him forward, crumpled his knees so that he went down flat on his face on shell and sand. Above him a voice began to bellow, "Brady! Rogers! I got him! Come quick!"

Dean rolled, got swaying to hands and knees. There was a red mist in front of his eyes and the earth seemed to waver. He twisted his head, saw Russell's pale face bending above him, saw the politician's right hand swing back holding a rock. The hand lashed down at his skull.

There wasn't much chance to dodge. Only one chance and Dean took it. From hands and knees he dived straight at the big man.

He felt the rock smash into his back at the same instant his shoulder struck Russell's knees. They went down with a crash, the big man yelling, "Help! He's a murderer! Help!"

Dean rolled and was free. Only a few instants now and the armed guards would be here. Off to the left one was shouting; persons were running from every direction. Dean could feel his remaining seconds of freedom rushing away from him. But he gambled and wasted one of those seconds. He took time to smash Russell's nose with a right arm swing. Then he was up and running.

It was a full ten yards to the gate, but nobody got in his way until a gate keeper stepped out, braced and waiting. Dean never broke his stride, driving with shoulders down, head up, like a racing halfback. His stiff arm caught the gatekeeper under the chin, lifted him and flung him backward.

Behind him a gun cracked twice. He felt the whip of air past his face, heard the bullet spank into an automobile ahead of him. Then he was through a line of parked cars, cutting to the left, to the right again.

He had come in a U-Drive-It, but it was parked too far away and there'd be no chance to reach it. He took the

first car that had the keys in it. Tomorrow the owner would get it back with a hundred dollar bill under the horn button, if Dean was still alive. If he weren't, the owner would get the car back anyway.

"Russell must have seen me," he thought as the car raced down the road toward the Bradenton-Sarasota Highway, "when I came out of the grandstand. He didn't have a gun and was afraid I'd get away if he waited, so he picked up a rock and socked me." Dean let the fingers of his right hand touch gently on the gash in his scalp.

And then his crooked grin widened as he remembered the feel of Russell's nose under his fist.

DEAN didn't know the city editor of the *Journal,* but he'd heard of him as a first rate newspaperman. Limitless Dean gambled on that. If he were going to solve the murder of the girl he'd have to do it quick, and he'd need help. Perhaps McGruder, the city editor, would turn him over to the cops. Perhaps he'd help him. Limitless Dean was playing for the biggest stakes of his life.

The *Journal* is an afternoon paper; so McGruder was home when Dean rang his bell shortly before midnight. He was a slight, middle-aged man with a jaw that bulged from constant clamping on a pipe stem. When he opened his door he was in shirt sleeves, collar open, tie pulled down, the pipe in his mouth.

Dean said, "You're Sam McGruder?"

"Yes."

"My name's Dean. I've worked on the Miami *Herald,* the Baltimore *World,* the New York *Democrat,* and some others. I used to work with Pete Raymond, a friend of yours."

"Come in," McGruder said. "I've heard about you. But if you're looking for a job, I'm afraid I can't help you right now."

"I'm being looked *for,*" Dean said slowly. "On a murder charge."

McGruder stiffened and his teeth clamped tighter on his pipe. "Let's hear it," he said.

Dean told him. And watching the man's face he knew he'd won. "It's your story for helping me," he said. "I'll write a first person account if you want it, free. How about it?"

McGruder tightened his tie without buttoning his collar. "Where do we start?"

"Who handled the number three dog tonight? He handled the same one in each race. I want his name and address, and I don't want him to know we've got it."

McGruder said, "Wait'll I get on the phone."

IT was a small frame house on the outskirts of town. There was a light burning although it was almost two o'clock. Dean went up the steps and thumbed the button.

Inside a voice muttered, then steps came down the hallway. A youngish, middle-sized man opened the door. "Whatta you want?" he said. He had a high, thin voice.

There was no light here except that from an open door down the hall. Dean said, "Are you John Porter?"

"I'm him." The man sounded annoyed, almost frightened. "Whatta you want?"

"You," Dean said. His hand moved swiftly and clamped on Porter's coat. He half shoved, half flung him backward, still holding his coat. Then Dean was inside, heeling the door shut behind him. His eyes were on the open

doorway down the hall. "Who's with you?"

"Nobody. I swear there ain't!" Porter chattered. Then, almost abruptly, he seemed to get control of himself. He tried to knock Dean's hand from his coat. "What the hell you busting in here for? Who are you?" he demanded shrilly.

Dean said, "Don't get tough, Daisy," and hit him. It wasn't a knockout blow, but enough to shake the man to his heels. He staggered, started to strike back, then thought better of it.

"What do you want?" he whined. "I ain't done nothing."

"Let's talk about it," Dean said. He pushed Porter down the hall and through the door into a cheaply furnished living room. A glass and a half empty bottle of beer rested on the table in the center.

Dean put the bottle to his lips and drained it, all the while watching the man opposite him. John Porter wasn't more than twenty-five, wider in the hips than he was in the shoulders. His face was handsome, weak-chinned, effeminate.

Dean said, "There was a murder out at the track tonight, Daisy. You heard about it?"

"Yes, and they know who committed it," the man said primly. "And my name's not Daisy."

"You're wrong about the park officials knowing who did the killing, Daisy," Dean said. "They don't. But I do!"

The man's face drained pale. He backed a step away. "Wha—what do you mean?"

"The girl saw you put the big white dog in the box before the fourth race. That dog was the favorite, but he didn't run well."

"But I—"

"He didn't run because you'd fixed him so he couldn't. And the girl saw you. You were afraid she'd report you to Harry Conner, her friend who's on the racing commission. That would have meant prison."

"I—I . . ." Frightened tears had come into Porter's eyes, but he tried to blink them away and look dignified. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Maybe," Dean said, "this will remind you." He moved so swiftly that Porter scarcely had a chance to gasp. His left hand caught Porter's shirt. His right hand, open, slapped Porter's cheek with a sound like a rifle fire, slapped him again. He shook him so that the man's head jerked back and forth as though it would snap from his spine. Then he held him steady, drew back his right hand to strike again.

Porter screamed, "Wait! Don't hit me again! Wait!"

"You killed her," Dean said. He was still holding his hand ready to strike.

The man was sobbing now. "I didn't kill her! I didn't! I never left the paddock!"

"Who did? Who'd you tell that she'd seen you?"

"I—I—didn't . . ."

Dean hit him. "I'm not a cop," he snapped. "What I want is a cut on the money you were making. Who was working with you?" His hand fisted slowly. The wrist curved to strike.

Porter watched it fascinated. His eyes bulged. His mouth hung open. Huge beads of sweat puffed on his cheeks.

And then he broke. "Don't!" he yelled. "I'll tell you. I called Arthur Delaney. He's one of the clerks. I couldn't get away from the paddock, but there's a telephone. I called him. We'll cut with you. I swear we will!"

DEAN left his arm down slowly. He released the little man who stumbled back and flopped into a chair panting. The slight crooked smile was on Dean's face. "I reckon that'll do it," he said.

The front door banged open. Steps came down the hall. It was McGruder, the pipe twisting one side of his mouth, the other wrinkled up in a wide grin. He said: "Right under the window and I got it all."

Porter had backed against the wall whimpering. "He said he wasn't—wasn't a cop. He said—"

"He's not a cop," McGruder said. "He's the guy that was accused of murder. Finding who did it saves his own life. I don't think the cops should have much trouble proving this Arthur Delaney is the guy who knocked her off."

"He probably saw her lead me outside," Dean said. "He used the corridor from the mutuel windows and heard her trying to shake me down. Usually people don't bet much on one dog race and when she saw it was fixed, then saw me collecting, she thought I was in on the fix. She must have been right behind Porter when he put the dog in the box and she saw whatever he did. Delaney knocked her off to save his racket."

"He didn't save it," McGruder said. "It'll be the chair for him."

A voice came softly from the doorway: "I don't think so."

Dean felt his heart slam against his ribs. He felt the stiffening of his lungs. And then he was facing the doorway.

The man standing there had a round, moon face with pink cheeks. He had a gun in his hand and the gun was very steady. Porter said, "Arthur! Where . . .?" It was the clerk who'd sold Dean his tickets on Trumpet.

"Well, well, gentlemen," Arthur Delaney said breezily. "I have been told that one murder often has a way of increasing. But I didn't expect it would breed so rapidly. It's really worse than rabbits."

Porter moved two stumbling steps toward Delaney, but a gesture of the gun halted him. "Wha—what do you mean?" he stammered.

Delaney shook his bald head. "You can't be trusted to keep your mouth shut, John. So I'm afraid I'll have to close it for you."

The little crooked smile was on Dean's face and his dark eyes were blank as ever.

HE said: "It's lucky you happened to drop in. Lucky for you." He was judging his chances with a gambler's eyes and mind.

"I was coming to split the night's profits with John," Delaney said. "I saw someone listening under the window, then watched him come inside. So I slipped in after him and overheard part of your conversation." He puffed his cheeks and shook his head sorrowfully. "It was a nice racket while it lasted. John and I didn't work every race, just the ones we could make into a fairly sure thing. If he handled the favorite, a simple sandspur under his muzzle might cause him to lose. I could watch the odds and know when to sell myself a ticket. It wasn't exactly legal, but it worked. Sometimes we speeded up a dog with dope, if it would pay well enough. We couldn't win on every one, but we generally made a few hundred every night."

"It's a wonder you weren't caught before," Dean said. He was stalling, his face blank except for that crooked smile. His feet, a quarter of an inch at a time, slid backward, carrying him.

Delaney said sharply, "Let's get it over with. You first, John." He swung the gun and fired. The sound still thundered when Delaney said, "You next, my friend," and turned to Dean.

Limitless Dean had found the beer bottle in the instant that the gun boomed. He flung it, snapping it with his wrist the way a man might deal a card. It seemed to rise slowly into the air, to hang there, floating toward Delaney. Dean swayed sideways, ducked, and dived.

Delaney saw the bottle exactly as his finger tightened on the trigger. It made him jerk and the bullet went wide. He leaped sideways, batting at the bottle with his left hand, swinging the gun. Dean struck him just over the knees.

Dean wriggled frantically upward, pawing for Delaney's gun hand. He couldn't find it.

And then he heard McGruder saying, "Okay. You don't need to hit him again. I did it—with the electric lamp."

"I'LL handle the news story," McGruder said. "You give me a first person account."

They were in the newspaper office.

Dean said, "Okay. Which typewriter do I use?"

"That one," McGruder said, pointing with his pipe. "But there's a point or two I want first. How did you figure the races were crooked, and how'd you pick Porter as the guy?"

"You can call it the Clue of The Drop of Blood," Dean said. "One of the handlers, trotting up the track past me, flung off a drop of blood from his hand. There wasn't anywhere else it could have come from. He probably stuck his finger working on the dog, or it may have been the dog's blood. And all of a sudden it hit me that the handler putting the dog in the box was about the only person with a chance to do any dirty work."

"You saw it on his hand then?"

"Nope," Dean said. "I didn't know which man it came from. I studied the results to find out. When a favorite had run from the number three post he didn't get anywhere, and consequently the winners paid bigger odds."

"All right," McGruder said. "Turn it out."

A minute later Dean stopped his pounding, wheeled his chair. "How does this paper get along with Bill Russell?" he asked.

McGruder said, "Not worth a whoop."

"Thanks," Dean said. "He probably believed I was guilty, but he was going to railroad me to make sure I went up, guilty or not. I'll take my first swing at him in this story. And then I'll call on him personally."

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MOUNTAIN MAN

A Novelette

By Norbert Davis

Author of "Indian Sign," "Beauty in the Morgue," etc.

A Sculptor Should Be Able to Recognize a Chiseler When He Sees One, But Even Saul Jarret Was Fooled For a Time

THE *Forsyth Arms* was a tall, narrow building, an impressionistic monument, draped with an irregular string of bright jewels that were lights in narrow windows, tapering up to thin spires like black needles against the dark sky. The taxi came around the corner above it with a rolling squeal of tires, swerved into the curb, stopped in front of the striped canopy that extended out over the sidewalk.

"Here you are," said the driver. He reached back and clicked the release on the meter and handed Saul Jarret the white slip. "Fifty-five cents."

Jarret gave him a dollar.

"What the hell is this?" asked the driver, looking at it.

"A silver dollar. They use a lot of them out west. I just came back from Nevada."

"Oh," said the driver, weighing the coin in his hand. "I ain't seen one like it for ten years. Say, a few of these would load a guy down and make him think he was really worth something. Wait'll I get the change."

"Keep it," Jarret advised, getting out of the cab.

"Thanks, boss. Now I've always wanted to go to Nevada myself. I hear Reno is—"

There was a sudden scuffle of feet on the sidewalk behind him, and Jarret turned around. He was a short man, thick-set, with widely sloping shoulders and a deep chest. He wore a close-clipped beard that looked black and shiny against the darkly tanned skin on his face. His eyes were a light blue, shaded now by the turned-down brim of his black hat.

"Fight," said the driver, interested.

Two men struggled out of the shadows into the light in front of the entrance of the building. One had a grip on the other from behind and was trying to hold him up and shove him forward at the same time. The second man's legs were lax and wavering under him. His arms flopped, and his head rolled loosely on his shoulders.

"Aw, it's just a cop with a lush," said the driver. "Hey, chum, has he got dough enough for a ride?"

"He lives here," Jarret said.

"Phooey," said the driver. "Just my luck."

Jarret approached the other two men. He walked with a quick cat-like litheness that was surprising in a man of his weight and bulk.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

The policeman was short and dumpily fat. His uniform emphasized rather than concealed his softly protruding paunch, and his eyes were wide and fishily colorless. His face was flushed now.

"Hello, Mr. Jarret," he greeted. "It's Palmer again. He's out cold."

The door opened and a revolver slid out to point at Jarret

Palmer was a much younger man. He was almost a head taller than the policeman. He was dressed in a tuxedo that was smeared with dust, and there was a long jagged grease-stain on his starched shirt. His eyes were open, but there was no sense or reason in them. He was limp, resting his whole weight on the policeman.

"I seen him drive in," the policeman explained. "He wasn't doin' so good, but he made it down into the garage okay. Then he come up the ramp—meant to get some air, I guess. He flopped on the sidewalk. Thought I better pick him up and take him inside. He's sure got a load on board."

"Yes," said Jarret. "What's your name?"

"It's Murtha, Mr. Jarret. You remember seein' me around here, don't you? I been on this beat—"

"Too long," Jarret finished. "I remember you very well. The first time I saw you, you sold me some tickets to a police benefit. I found out later there wasn't any benefit. The tickets were fakes."

"Well, now," said Murtha, smiling in a shame-faced way. "That was just a little mistake I made, and it won't happen again, Mr. Jarret. Now, I'll tell you what—"

"I'll tell you," said Jarret. "The second time I saw you, you offered to fix any traffic tags I might get for ten dollars apiece."

"Oh, well," Murtha said uneasily. "Now that was just a personal favor to you, Mr. Jarret. I wasn't makin' any money on the deal—not at all."

"Only five dollars," Jarret amended. "You were splitting with the clerk in the traffic court. I looked it up."

The policeman frowned.

"Well, Mr. Jarret, a man's got to live."

"And now I find you picking pockets.

You're quite a credit to the police force."

"What?" Murtha exclaimed. "Picking pockets! Me? Why—"

"I saw you take Palmer's wallet out of his pocket. Put it back again."

"Why, you're crazy! Why, I never—"

"Put it back," said Jarret.

Murtha's eyes were narrowed a little with cold, congealing hatred. "Why, sure!" He tried to make his voice hearty, but it sounded thick and choked. "Sure thing. I just thought—somebody might lift it. I thought I better take care . . . Here it is. See?"

Freeing one hand, he produced a black wallet and slid it back into the inside pocket of Palmer's coat. He was smiling, and the effort it took made the fat around his mouth stand out in small, quivering knobs.

"Did you take anything out of it?" Jarret asked.

"Me? *Take* anything! Why, I wouldn't—"

"Did you?" said Jarret.

Murtha's smile was a horrible grimace frozen on his face. "Ha-ha!" His breath caught in his throat, and the laugh ended in a gasp. "No!" He spat the word out.

"That's good," Jarret said easily. "I'll take him now."

He slipped one arm around Palmer's shoulders, the other under his legs. He swung the man up effortlessly, carrying him like a child, although Palmer weighed very nearly as much as he did. Without saying anything more to Murtha, he turned and walked quickly up the steps, through the heavy brass-bound doors and into the high narrow lobby that was bright and glittering with modernistic chromium furniture and fixtures.

There was a slim youth in a blue uniform behind the short desk at the side, and he stood up alertly when Jarret appeared.

"Good evening, Mr. Jarret," he said. "What . . ."

"Palmer," Jarret said. "He's drunk. Passed out. Can you take care of him?"

"Sure," said the clerk. "I've had plenty of practice. I've had to put him to bed twice a week on the average for the last six months. Just dump him in the elevator."

Jarret crossed to the elevator, with the clerk following, and let Palmer slump down limply in one corner. The man was snoring loudly, his head canted over on one shoulder. His black hair, heavy with pomade, hung stringily down over his forehead. His features were even and clean-cut, marred only by the petulant droop of weakly sagging lips.

The clerk closed the door, punched one of the buttons. "He sure hits it hard. He drinks it by the quart. He ain't gonna last long if he don't slow up." The elevator stopped, and the clerk opened the grill. "Here you are, Mr. Jarret."

"Are you sure you can take care of him?"

"You bet. I can't carry him like you did. I just drag him by the heels, but he don't seem to mind at all. Good night, Mr. Jarret."

"Good night," Jarret said.

HE WENT down the long hallway, his feet soundless on the thick, dark blue carpet. Turning the corner, he stopped in front of the door of his apartment, found his key. The door opened silently, and he reached around the corner and flicked on the light. He stepped into a narrow entry hall, dropped his coat and hat carelessly on a chair. Going on into the long, low liv-

ing room, he flicked on another light and then stopped short, staring.

A man was lying on the low, white leather couch under the windows on the opposite side of the room. He lay very still, rigid, with his thin arms flung wide, fists clenched. His knees were doubled up. His face was swollen, purplish. His eyes were open, but he wasn't breathing.

Jarret didn't move for a moment, except to turn his head slowly, looking all around the room. There was no sound, no sign of anyone else's presence, no evidence that the furniture had been disturbed at all. Jarret drew a long breath and then walked with quick, noiseless steps to the table in the center of the room, opened a drawer.

He took out a small, flat automatic. It looked tiny and sinister, gripped in his big, calloused fingers. The safety clicked softly. With the gun held in front of him, he walked quietly into the bedroom. He looked in the closets, in the bathroom. Nothing had been disturbed. There was no one else in the apartment.

Jarret came back into the living room and stared down at the dead man on the couch. There were dark welts on the man's throat. He had been strangled. He was an elderly man with thin gray hair, a harshly weather-beaten face. Jarret had never seen him before.

The man's clothes were new, and they were of excellent quality, but they didn't fit him well. The sleeves of the coat were too long, and the trousers bunched in wrinkles around his ankles. He was wearing boots with elastic inserted in their sides. They looked expensive and comfortable.

Jarret scowled, staring at the boots, and the expression made his face seem darker and older. He rasped his thumb along the black stubble of his beard. He turned toward the telephone on the stand beside the door, and then stopped as he rememberd that the clerk was putting Palmer to bed and wasn't on duty to put a call through the switchboard.

The door bell made a sudden buzzing hum—repeated once and then again. Jarret started involuntarily. He hesitated for a moment and then slid the automatic into his hip pocket and walked quietly to the door, opened it.

"Yes?" he said. His voice was polite and level, indifferent.

The girl had her hand up, forefinger extended and touching the door bell, ready to ring it again. She was small, and she had a jaunty air that was appealing rather than impudent, because it was obviously assumed. She had a delicately pointed face and wide-set eyes that looked very deep and brown. She wore a dark tailored suit, and her hair curled in black shining ringlets under a small, round hat. She smiled up at Jarret.

"Are—are you Mr. Saul Jarret—the artist?"

"I'm Saul Jarret. There's quite a difference of opinion as to whether I'm an artist or not. Some people doubt it."

"Oh, I don't! I've seen lots of your work, and—and I admire it tremendously! I think it's beautiful!"

"My oils or my water-colors?" Jarret asked.

He seemed very pleased.

"Oh—both! I—like them both. Really."

"Thank you," said Jarret.

She drew a deep breath. "Mr. Jarret, my name is Dale Lee. I heard that you might need a new model, and I—I'd like to apply for the position."

"Model?" Jarret repeated. "Are you a model?"

"Oh, yes! I've had a great deal of

experience. Do—you think I would do?"

"I don't know," Jarret said slowly. "You're a little small for the sort of work I specialize in."

"Please let me try! I'm sorry to bother you this late, but I really need the work—very badly. I came right over here as soon as I heard about you."

"I don't know whether you'd do or not," Jarret said. "I can't tell when you're dressed. I don't know how well proportioned you are."

Her smile was strained. "I—I think I'm all right."

Jarret moved his wide shoulders. "Well, we can see. Come on in, and I'll look at you."

"Now?" she asked doubtfully.

Jarret nodded. "Yes. I work at night."

"You—work here?"

Jarret nodded again. "Yes. Come on in. You can undress in the bedroom. There's a robe in the closet my models use."

SHE hesitated, and her throat moved as she swallowed. "Surely," she said. Her smile was desperate. "It's nice of you."

She walked past him, and Jarret shut the door softly and followed her in his noiseless, swift way. She stopped short in the doorway of the living room, and her slim back suddenly jerked into rigidly tense lines. She was looking at the dead man on the couch.

Jarret caught her by the shoulder and whirled her around. All the bright cheerfulness had gone from her face in one split-second, and her red lips twisted in soundless horror.

"He's dead," Jarret said softly. "He can't hurt you, but I can. Now what's the idea?"

Her lips trembled. "D-dead! He—you—"

Jarret shook her roughly. "Who is he? Who killed him?"

"I—don't know."

"You lie," said Jarret. "You've been lying ever since I opened that door. You're not an artist's model. If you knew anything about it at all, you'd know I wasn't a painter and that I didn't have any use for models in my work. Now let's have some truth for a change. What's your name? Is it Dale Lee?"

Her voice was a terrified whisper. "Y-yes."

"Who's the man on the couch?"

"I—don't know."

Jarret shook her again. "Don't lie. You do know."

"No! I—I saw him tonight—in a bar—and he was talking about you and saying he was going to give you work. I thought—I thought—if I could work with you . . . I wanted to see him and talk to him privately."

Jarret scowled at her incredulously. "Why didn't you speak to him in the bar where you heard him mention my name? Why go to all this trouble?"

"I couldn't talk to him there. He wouldn't have believed me, trusted me."

"Why was that so important? What did you want to talk to him about?"

She shook her head. "I can't tell you."

"You can," said Jarret. "And you will."

"No! It's not my secret to tell."

Jarret gripped her slim shoulder hard with his big fingers. "Listen to me. This is murder, do you understand that? This man was killed—strangled. I'm involved because he's here in my apartment. I'm not going to argue with you about secrets. I want to know

everything you know about this, and I want to know it right now. I don't want to get rough with you, but I will if I have to. Now tell me."

Her face was drained of all color, and her eyes were glassily slick with fear. She shook her head mutely, stubbornly, not trusting her voice.

There was a double *rat-ta-tat* of knuckles on the outside door of the apartment. Then the door bell began to ring jerkily in a syncopated series of buzzes.

"You stay right here," Jarret said.

"Yes," she whispered obediently.

Jarret went back through the entry hall, opened the door. Palmer was leaning against the wall just outside. He was humming softly to himself, keeping time by punching the door bell. He was wearing rumpled blue pajamas now with a blue robe over them, and he was bare-footed. When he saw Jarret he stopped punching the bell and blinked sleepily.

"Hello," he said.

"What do you want?" Jarret demanded.

"Give me a drink please."

"You've had about enough for one night," Jarret told him.

"You're wrong," said Palmer. "Oh, you're very much in error. The thing I need most right now is a drink. That's really true. I assure you."

"I haven't anything to drink."

Palmer shook his head sadly. "Tut-tut. My dear man, you are quite obviously trying to deceive me. It's impossible. When it comes to liquor, I have the gifts of a bloodhound. I can smell it from afar, which is how I come to be here. Finding I had none myself, I merely stepped out into the hall and followed my nose. It would be very discourteous to refuse me a drink. Really it would."

"I'm not feeling polite this evening," Jarret said. "Good-night." He started to shut the door.

"No, no!" Palmer wailed. "My dear man, do not desert me in this dreadful hour—"

The scream came then, and cut through his words, choking them off short. It seemed far away, and it had a hollow, echoing thinness that emphasized the lonely terror of the sound. It pulsated in the air, and it jerked Jarret around as though an invisible hand had seized him.

He ran back into the living room. The dead man still lay rigid and motionless on the white leather couch. But he was alone now. There was no one else in the room. Dale Lee was gone.

Jarret swore in a whisper. He reached the bedroom door in three strides, shoved it wide open. The room was dark, and the light from the living room only penetrated it partially. Jarret's eyes caught the ghostly tremble of the curtain in front of the window beside the bed. The window was open.

HE KNOCKED the curtain aside, leaned far out, looking down. There was an alley on this side of the apartment house, separating it from another and lower building. A feeble globe burning over the side door reflected slickly from the latticed web of a fire escape that criss-crossed back and forth downward from Jarret's window. There was something just on the edge of the light, down there far below on the dark alley paving. It was a twisted thing, black and broken and sprawling awkwardly.

Jarret's breath caught in his throat. He slid out through the window on to the fire escape. He started down, and his feet made a rattling, echoing clatter on the iron rungs. Other windows were

opening above and below him, and voices shouted questions in excited jumbled incoherence.

Jarret swung down off the ladder at the end of the fire escape, landed hard on his heels. He staggered, caught his balance, and ran toward the darkly huddled heap on the paving. He started to kneel down beside it, and then he froze there, half-crouching.

The dark, crushed figure was not Dale Lee. It was not a woman at all. It was Murtha, the policeman, and his fat body was flat and deflated looking in death. The side of his head was smashed, and blood made a slick, spreading pool under him.

"Just hold it," a voice said coldly from behind Jarret. "Just stay right where you are. Keep your hands in front of you."

Jarret waited, stiffly motionless. He felt his hip pocket twitch as the automatic was withdrawn.

"All right. Stand up, now. Turn around."

Jarret stood up and turned slowly. The other man had stepped back a couple of paces, warily. He was holding a big revolver in his right hand. He held it casually and easily, as though he knew very well how to use it.

"Name's Jarret, isn't it?" he asked.

He was a thin man, stooped a little. He had a long face, heavy-jawed, with deep, hard lines around his mouth. His eyes were small and round and cold. He wore a dark suit, a dark hat, and his voice was flatly impersonal, neither friendly nor unfriendly.

"Yes," said Jarret.

"Thought there wouldn't be more that one young guy with a beard around here. Did you do this?"

Jarret watched him a moment in silence and then said: "No. Who are you?"

The man pulled the left lapel of his coat back, revealing the metallic glint of a badge. "My name is Harkwith. I'm a detective. Special duty. I was trailing Murtha around. You had a quarrel with him just a little while ago. There's no use denying it. I was close enough to see you."

"He was a crook," Jarret said evenly. "He was trying to rob a drunk that lives here in the building, and I called him on it."

Harkwith nodded. "Yeah. I know he was a crook. That's why I was following him. I was gathering evidence to take before the Police Commissioner. He was a dirty, sneaking rat and a disgrace to the uniform he wore, but that doesn't give you the right to push him off fire escapes."

"I didn't, and I can prove it. I was talking to another person at the time he screamed."

"How do you know it was him that screamed?"

Jarret stared at him. "Why—I don't. But I thought . . ."

"Uh-huh," Harkwith said. "Maybe it was him, I dunno. I was up the street a block when I heard it. Sounded more like a woman than a man to me. But there was nobody except him around here when I came—until you came busting down the fire escape."

JARRET was silent, thinking about Dale Lee. He was conscious suddenly of the curious faces that were peering down at them from windows in the apartment house. Brakes made a grinding wail from the street as a long blue touring car swung sideways in front of the alley and stopped with a jar. Two uniformed policemen got out and came running down the alley. Light glistened in quick little flicks from the guns they carried.

"Hello, boys," Harkwith said. "You got here in a hurry."

One of the policemen said: "Hello, Hark. What—"

"Murtha," Harkwith said. "He got himself pushed off the fire escape. He's deader than a salted smelt, which don't make me very unhappy."

The policemen were looking at Jarret.

"This guy do it?" one asked.

"Maybe," said Harkwith. "I was just decidin' when you showed up."

"There's a dead man in my apartment," Jarret said.

Harkwith and the two policemen watched him silently.

"He was there when I came home," Jarret continued. He could feel the weight of their steadily cold, suspicious eyes, and it took an effort to keep his voice level. "I don't know who he is or who killed him."

"The general practice is to report things like that to the police," Harkwith said.

"I am reporting it."

"Yeah," Harkwith agreed. "Now you are. What was you doin' before?"

"I didn't have time. The switchboard operator was gone, and I couldn't put a call through. And then—Palmer, the drunk Murtha tried to rob, came to the door, and I was talking to him, trying to get rid of him, when I heard the scream."

"Well, well," Harkwith said. "You been havin' a busy day. You boys stay here. I'll go up with Jarret and take a look at the other stiff in his collection. Just walk ahead of me, son, and don't be dumb enough to try to run."

II

WHEN Harkwith and Jarret came into the living room of the apartment they found Palmer lounging in a chair with his bare feet up on top of the table. He had found Jarret's whiskey. There was a bottle of it sitting on the floor beside his chair.

"Hello," he said. "Hello, hello, hello. Greetings. Come in and sit down."

"There's the body," Jarret said to Harkwith, pointing to the rigid corpse on the couch. "This is Palmer. He's the drunk I told you about. The one Murtha tried to rob, and the one I was talking to when we heard the scream."

"Cheer-o," said Palmer. The whiskey actually seemed to have done him some good. He didn't look either sleepy or tired now. He had an air of fuddled, beaming cheerfulness.

Harkwith looked him over carefully, nodded once, and then walked to the couch and stared down at the body.

"Dear old Uncle Casper," Palmer said, sighing. "Too, too bad."

Both Jarret and Harkwith turned to look at him.

"What did you say?" Jarret demanded.

Palmer blinked at him. "I said it was too, too bad about dear old Uncle Casper."

"You mean this dead man is your uncle?" Jarret asked tensely.

"Oh, yes," Palmer said.

Harkwith reached the table in two strides. "Now snap out of it, dope! This man is your uncle, you say. All right. What's his name?"

"Casper," Palmer said, staring owlishly. "It really is. Believe it or not. Casper Faulkner. Are you by any chance connected with the police, my good man? You have an air of ignorant insolence that seems faintly familiar."

Harkwith's voice was flat and hard. "Yes, I'm connected with the police, and I'm going to connect with you in about a minute. Where does your uncle live?"

"In a place called Sand River, Nevada," Palmer answered amiably. "That's where he heard of your work, Jarret. You know, you shouldn't go killing your customers. It's bad for the business. Now Uncle Casper was going to give you a nice job. I recommended you highly, and I don't think—"

"Shut up," said Harkwith. "Answer my questions. When did you see your uncle last?"

Palmer scratched his head. "Sometime early in the evening. Oh, yes. I remember now. We had dinner together at *Willie's*. Uncle Casper left early to come and see Jarret."

"He was going to give you a job," Harkwith said, turning on Jarret. "What kind of work do you do?"

"I'm a sculptor."

"Pretty good one, too," Palmer added.

"What kind of a statue was your uncle going to have him make?"

"I don't make statues," Jarret answered for Palmer. "I'm a sort of naturalistic sculptor."

"And just what would that mean?" asked Harkwith.

"It's hard to put a name to it. I carve monuments and memorials out of cliffs, mountains, bluffs, or anything handy in the way of natural stone formation. Things done on a large scale to commemorate some person or event."

"Oh, yeah," Harkwith said. "I get it. I was reading about something like that awhile back." He squinted thoughtfully at Jarret. "That explains, then, where you got those shoulders and arms of yours."

Jarret nodded. "It's hard work. Ever see any of the pictures of the high scalers working on Boulder Dam? Hanging down over the cliff on ropes? That's the way I work, too."

Harkwith turned back to Palmer. "And your uncle wanted Jarret to do something like that for him?"

"Yes," said Palmer. "Uncle Casper was a bit on the balmy side. It seems to run in the family, unfortunately. He has a ranch in Nevada, and there's a fairly high mountain on it. Uncle Casper was going to have Jarret carve an image of himself and some stuff tracing his own history. How he came over in a covered wagon and settled there—all the rest of it. Screwy, but harmless—that was Uncle Casper."

THE telephone rang shrilly. Jarret walked over to the stand beside the door, picked the instrument up.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Jarret, this is Jimmy, the clerk down at the desk. Say, I've been so excited about everything that's happening that I sort of forgot . . ."

Harkwith came walking silently up behind Jarret. He was carrying his big revolver in his right hand. He touched Jarret's arm with the short barrel warningly, then held his ear close enough to the receiver to hear what the clerk said.

"Yes, Jimmy," Jarret answered. "Go on. What did you forget?"

"Well, that girl. She said she had a business appointment with you, and I had just got back from putting Palmer to bed, and I didn't want to leave the switchboard again, so I just told her to go up to your apartment. Was that all right?"

"Give me that telephone!" Harkwith snarled. He jerked the instrument out of Jarret's hands, spoke into it. "You! What girl are you talking about? Did you know her? When did she come up here?"

"Harkwith," Jarret murmured.

Harkwith half turned his head.

"You shut up! Trying to hold out on me—"

Jarret hit him. It was a short, snapping blow that didn't travel more than six inches. Jarret's big, hard fist took Harkwith in the angle of his bony jaw, knocked him headlong into the wall. The revolver spun on the rug, and Jarret put his foot on it. Harkwith slid down against the wall, folded up into a limp, twitching heap.

Jarret picked up the telephone. "Hello, Jimmy. Sorry to startle you like that. My friend just dropped the telephone. Thanks for telling me about the girl. It was okay."

He hung up the receiver and looked narrowly at Palmer. Palmer's mouth was wide open, and he was staring at Jarret with bulging, incredulous eyes. He held up both hands, palms outward.

"Hey," he said feebly. "Deal me out of this. I'm just an innocent spectator."

"See that you stay that way," Jarret advised. He leaned down and picked up Harkwith's revolver. He got his own small automatic out of Harkwith's coat pocket, and then rolled the man over and propped him up against the wall.

"Could—could I have a drink, please?" Palmer asked.

Jarret nodded. "Go ahead."

Palmer picked up the bottle and gulped audibly. "Listen, old man," he said, lowering the bottle. "You—you can't do things like this, you know. Knocking policemen around and taking their guns."

"I did it," said Jarret.

Palmer nodded. "You did. You certainly did. And to think I've been living in innocence right above you all this time! Oh, my! Would—would you mind if I sort of—left now?"

"Yes, I would," said Jarret. "You're staying."

"Surely," Palmer said hastily. "Right-o! Forget I even mentioned it. But really, I'm not holding any grudge on account of Uncle Casper, Jarret. I'm really not. The old boy was cracked as they come, and anyway he didn't like me a little bit."

"I didn't kill him."

"No!" said Palmer. "Oh, no! Of course not!"

He regarded Jarret wonderingly.

Harkwith stirred a little. His eyes opened, blinked in blank astonishment. He saw Jarret standing and watching him, and then his eyes narrowed slowly until they were small and round and venomously cold. His voice was thick with suppressed rage.

"That was very nice." He took a long breath. "Damn you, that's the first time anybody ever took me like that since I was a rookie. You fooled me. I wasn't looking for it, and it's lucky for you I wasn't."

"I know it," said Jarret. "Sorry I had to hit you, but I'm seeing this through on my own. Stand up. I'm going to lock you both in the closet."

Harkwith got up slowly and stiffly, supporting himself against the wall.

"Could I take the whiskey along, please?" Palmer inquired.

Jarret nodded. "Yes. Get in that closet. Both of you."

He backed them across the room, into the closet.

"I'll leave your gun on the table," he said to Harkwith.

"Don't," said Harkwith. "Take it along. I can get another easy enough, and you'll need two when we meet the next time."

Jarret shut the closet door and locked it. He dropped Harkwith's gun on the table, slid his own automatic into his hip pocket. Walking quickly into the hall, he picked up his coat and

hat and let himself out of the apartment, locking the door behind him.

There was no one in this short end of the hall, and Jarret walked unhurriedly toward the back and the service elevator. A siren sounded faintly, coming closer, as he punched the electric control button beside the elevator shaft. He was scowling, and he could feel the hammering throb of his heart. His throat ached with strain, and he forced himself to breathe evenly and slowly, to relax.

He knew that he had done the wrong thing, and he regretted having done it. But he was used to fighting out his own problems, working alone and without help. And he wanted to find the girl, Dale Lee, and learn what secret she had been trying to hide, where she fitted into the murder pattern. He wanted to find her before the police did and question her. He shouldn't have struck Harkwith. The detective was already suspicious of Jarret's guilt. He would be sure now. Jarret had acted on impulse. But it was too late to go back and try to straighten things out. He had to see it through.

III

AT THE end of a short alley that crawled back crookedly from the bright lights of Fifty-fourth Street was *Willie's Steak House*. The entrance was a red painted door with just the name *Willie* written across it in a flowing spattered script that was evidently a copy of the owner's signature.

The interior was two enormous low-ceilinged rooms that ran at right angles to each other. They were crowded now with after-theater patrons. People were dim and misty spectres through the rising swirls of tobacco smoke, dancing on the small floor in a packed, swaying mass, stacked three deep around the long bar. Noise rose in deafening waves.

Jarret hesitated for a second, standing in the doorway, and then slid into one of the high-backed booths in the bar room. A weary looking waiter appeared, dabbed at the scarred surface of the table with a bar towel, and looked inquiringly at Jarret.

"Rye and soda," Jarret ordered.

The waiter nodded and disappeared in the crowd. He was back in a surprisingly short time, balancing the glass of liquor expertly on a tray held up over his head.

Jarret paid for the drink and then said: "Just a moment," as the waiter started to move away. He took out a five dollar bill and folded it over his fingers. "Know a girl whose last name is Lee?"

The waiter looked at him thoughtfully for a second and then nodded. He reached down and took the five dollar bill.

"Wait here."

Jarret sipped at his drink. He watched the faces in the crowd near him, trying to keep his own face back in the shadows so that his beard wouldn't be noticeable.

Five minutes passed.

A MAN slid around the edge of the booth and sat down across the table from him. "Hello," he said, grinning. He was a short man with a round, pink face and teeth so even and white they looked artificial. His whitish blond hair was close-clipped. His eyes were very close together, a little blood-shot, wise and knowing and cynical.

"Who are you?" Jarret asked.

The man winked at him. "The waiter spoke to me." He had a white card in his pink, stubby fingers and he snapped it across the table.

Jarret looked at it. It said: *Stanley Senson—Private Investigator.*

"At your service," said the man, winking again.

Jarret studied him for a moment. "I haven't any use for a detective," he said at last.

"You never know," said Senson. "Now, Mr.—ah—I don't think I caught your name. . . ."

He raised his eyebrows.

"Jones," said Jarret.

"Oh, yes. To be sure. Mr. Jones. Now you were inquiring about a young lady by the name of Lee?"

"Yes," said Jarret. "Do you know her?"

"Very well, indeed," Senson said, nodding. "In a business way—of course. Would you be interested?"

"Yes," said Jarret.

Senson coughed meaningly. "To what extent, Mr. Jones?"

Jarret took a twenty dollar bill out of his wallet, laid it flat on the table, and put his right hand down flat on top of it.

"Ah!" Senson exclaimed. "Yes, yes. Well, you see I was engaged by a certain party to follow Miss Lee."

"Why?"

Senson chuckled slyly. "For the same reason you're interested in her, I imagine. The little lady has a habit of collecting letters from unwary gentlemen and then using them. She is very cute, you see, and she looks so innocently wide-eyed that no one suspects at first glance that she is nothing but a little . . ." He stopped, watching Jarret.

Jarret's eyes had narrowed down to cold, gleaming slits.

Senson moved his pink, soft hands. "Well! I see that I have made a mistake."

"Go on," Jarret said coldly. "Tell the rest of it. Only leave out your opinions. Give me the facts."

"All right," Senson agreed. "Until about a week ago she sang with the orchestra here. She was discharged due to this—little difficulty—with my client. At present, so I understand, she is unemployed, unless you consider blackmail employment."

"She has some letters your client wrote her?"

Senson nodded. "Yes."

"She's blackmailing him with them?"

Senson nodded again. "Yes. I was employed to see if I couldn't get them back from her. I haven't succeeded—so far."

"Do you know where she lives?"

"At a theatrical rooming house and apartment house called Mama Boule's. It's on Fourteenth Avenue. 4403 is the number."

Jarret stood up, sliding the bill across the table. "Thanks."

"Thanks to you," said Senson. "Good luck to you, also." He laughed in a knowing giggle.

IV

IT WAS a narrow, gaunt house, running up three stories to a steeply gabled roof. It had been white once, but the paint had faded to an indeterminate brown, and the eaves sagged drunkenly, rusted through. The street light at the corner threw jagged rays across the three worn wooden steps that led up to a miniature, box-like porch.

Jarret felt around in the shadow until he located the door bell, punched it once and then again. The sound of it was a faint, echoing trill somewhere far back in the house.

The door opened instantly, and a woman faced Jarret, looking up at him through a wisp of blue smoke from the

cigarette she held expertly in the corner of her mouth.

"Well? What do *you* want?"

She was short and blockily square, wide enough to fill the door completely. She had black hair, graying a little, curled in tight ringlets, and she wore a shapeless black dress and gray carpet slippers.

"Does a Miss Lee live here?" Jarret asked.

"She does."

"Is she in now?"

"She is."

"May I speak to her?"

The woman took the cigarette out of her mouth and snapped it past Jarret's shoulder out into the street. "What about?"

"That's my business," said Jarret.

"And mine," said the woman flatly. "I'm Mama Boule, and I run this place. Nobody gets in here unless I choose to let 'em in. Are you a private detective?"

"No," said Jarret.

"If you are," said Mama Boule, "you're the first one I ever saw that wore a beaver. But you can't tell about those scaly rats. They're liable to do anything—even grow a beard. You any relation to a louse named Senson?"

"No," Jarret repeated.

Mama Boule nodded meaningly. "A damned good thing. The next time I lay eyes on that scum I'm going to splash him all over the nearest wall. Now, what do you want with the Lee girl?"

"It's still my business," said Jarret.

Mama Boule squinted up at him calculatingly. "All right, then. You can see her. You look half-way decent. But remember, I like that girl. She's young, and she's green. She's just in from the country, and she's not on to cities yet, nor city men. But I'm protecting her, do you understand that? I won't have her annoyed or bothered."

"I won't annoy her," Jarret said.

Mama Boule produced a cigarette from the pocket of her dress and rolled it between thick, strong fingers, watching Jarret all the time with calculating eyes. "Don't, mister. Or I'll flatten you out like a rug. I'd hate to do that because I sort of like your looks, in spite of the shrubbery."

"I'd hate to have you do it," said Jarret.

Mama Boule jerked her head. "Upstairs. She has my front apartment. It's the first door on your right."

Mama Boule stood in the hallway while Jarret went up the narrow, carpeted stairway into the narrow straight hall directly above. He knocked softly on the first door. There was no answer. He knocked again, more loudly this time, and said:

"Miss Lee! This is Jarret—Saul Jarret. May I speak to you for a moment?"

He could hear his own voice echo in little whispers along the hall, but there was no other sound. Then Mama Boule's head appeared, and she came up the stairs with a quick silent swiftness.

"She doesn't answer," Jarret said.

"She was asleep," Mama Boule said. "She was tired and worried and half-sick. She was going to lie down. But she would have heard you knock. She sleeps very lightly."

MAMA BOULE had a key in her hand. It made a little grating noise in the lock, and then she pushed the door back. The room inside was dark. Mama Boule flicked the light switch. She said something in a startled whisper under her breath.

The room was a small one, but comfortable, made bright by colored

drapes, gaily flowered slip covers on the chairs and the couch. The slip covers had been ripped and slashed ruthlessly with a knife. The drapes were in shreds. Several pictures that had hung on the wall lay on the floor. A small writing desk had been opened, and the paper and letters that had filled it were strewn helter-skelter across the carpet.

"You!" said Mama Boule, whirling on Jarret. There were little reddish flecks in her eyes.

"Would I have come here now if I had done this?" Jarret asked.

"No," said Mama Boule. "No, no . . ."

"If there's another room . . ." Jarret suggested.

Mama Boule moved with astonishing swiftness across to the door in the opposite wall. It was open a little bit, and she pushed it wider and snapped on a light.

"Dieu!" she gasped.

This was the bedroom, and it had been served just like the other. The covers were pulled off the bed, the mattress slashed in criss-cross, savage strokes. Everything had been pulled out of the bureau, and the drawers of the dressing table gaped vacantly. All the clothes in the closet had been pulled out and thrown in a heap in the middle of the floor.

There was a girl lying on the floor, too, looking small and pitiful and childish in the welter of confusion around her. She wore a blue dressing gown twisted open to show a white, slimly rounded leg. There were black marks on her small throat, and her face was swollen and purple. Her hair glinted, silver-blonde in the light.

Mama Boule was kneeling beside her. "Dead," she said, and her lips twisted on the word. "Dead."

Jarret was staring at the silver-blonde hair. "This—this isn't Dale Lee."

"No!" said Mama Boule. "No, no! This is Doris Lee. She is Dale Lee's sister. Dale Lee doesn't live here."

Jarret drew in a long, gasping breath. The muscles of his face felt tight, drawing the skin dryly across his forehead and around his eyes. The beating of his heart was like the boom of a small, muffled drum in his ears.

Mama Boule was watching him, and now she stood up slowly and came a step closer. "You know who did it! You know!"

"Yes," said Jarret. "I know—now."

Mama Boule's breath came quick and short. "You'll find him. I can see in your face that you will. And when you do—remember me." Her fingers hooked into claws. "Remember Mama Boule."

Jarret's teeth gleamed whitely through his beard. "I'll remember. Give me a chance to get away from here before you notify the police."

"Yes," said Mama Boule.

V

JARRET came around the corner into Fifty-fourth a half block above the alley that led to the entrance of *Willie's*. He was walking fast without seeming to hurry, and he had taken three steps around the corner before he saw the long blue car parked across the alley mouth and the two men standing beside it. He stopped short, then, and backed to the corner and stood there half concealed, watching.

Harkwith was one of the men standing beside the police car. He had one foot up on the running board, bent forward a little, with his hat yanked down over his eyes. Jarret could see only the shadowy outline of his harsh profile.

The other man had his back turned, but Jarret could see the whitish, close-clipped hair, and he knew it was Senson, the private detective. Senson laughed now in his high-pitched voice and nodded triumphantly. He turned around and strolled back into the alley toward *Willie's*.

Harkwith got in the police car. It jerked away from the curb with a sudden crackle of the exhaust, went down the street away from Jarret, spun around the next corner.

There were two taxis parked at the stand across the street from the alley. Jarret approached the first and nodded to the driver, who was leaning over the back of the front seat listening to the radio.

"Where to?" the driver asked, opening the door.

"Just drive up to the next corner and park," Jarret said. "There's a man in *Willie's* I want to follow. He'll be out in a minute, I think."

The driver turned slowly to look over his shoulder. "Doc," he said uneasily, "you wouldn't be gonna use this hack as a duck blind, would you? You wouldn't be gonna knock that guy over?"

"No," said Jarret, smiling. "I just want to see him, and I don't think he wants to see me. I'm an installment collector. I want to repossess his piano, but I don't know where he lives."

"Oh," said the driver, relieved. "That's okay, then. Just hop right in, mister."

HE drove up to the corner and parked. They had waited about ten minutes when Senson came out of the alley, walked across the pavement, and got in the other taxi. It swung around in a U-turn and went down the street.

"That the bird?" the driver asked Jarret.

Jarret nodded. "Yes. Don't lose him."

"He's got the same chance of losin' me as a cat has of runnin' away from its tail," the driver said confidently.

He meshed the gears with a sudden clatter, spun the cab around on two wheels with an expert swing of his shoulders, hammered noisily down the street after the other taxi.

"Hide and seek?" he inquired.

"No," said Jarret. "I don't care if he sees us, as long as you don't lose sight of him."

"Aw, then it's a pipe."

The occupants of the other taxi gave no evidence that they knew they were being followed. The cab went straight down Fifty-fourth for a dozen blocks, jogged over to Fifty-third, then turned into Broadway. There was more traffic here, and Jarret's driver pulled up closer. The first cab turned off on Avalon and headed across town toward the down-at-the-heels apartment-residential district on the east side. It swung off on a dim, short street, stopped halfway down the block.

"Now what?" Jarret's driver demanded, slowing abruptly.

"Stop right behind him."

The tires squealed on the pavement as the driver swung into the curb and obeyed the order to the letter. His front bumper halted an inch from the other cab's spare tire. Jarret poked a bill over the driver's shoulder and stepped out on the sidewalk.

Senson had just gotten out of his cab and paid the driver. He was holding his hand out to receive the change. When he saw Jarrret he seemed to shrink a little inside his clothes, and his outstretched hand jerked uncontrollably. The change the driver had

given him hit the sidewalk with a ringing spatter of small coins.

"Hello, Senson," Jarret said. "Don't bother to pick it up. You won't need it."

"Jarr—" Senson started, and then gulped the rest of the word down. His breath sounded hoarsely. "Mr.—ah—Jones!"

"Yes," said Jarret. He had Senson by the right arm now, and his long fingers bit into the flabby flesh. He could feel the man trembling. "I want to talk to you. Let's step inside." The rest of his words were breathed in a faint, thin whisper. "Start a row, and I'll shoot you down here in the street."

Senson tried to say something, but his voice was a mumble. He watched Jarret with blood-shot eyes that had a sheen of terrified fascination.

Jarret swung him around. "Which house?"

Senson pointed mutely to the square, box-like building in front of them, and Jarret walked him up the wide stone steps. There were four doors. Senson stopped in front of one and made ineffectual sounds with white, stiff lips, indicating his coat pocket.

"Your keys?" Jarret guessed. "Take them out. If you've got a gun in that pocket, better leave it there."

"No!" Senson gasped. "Now, Mr. Jarret—I mean, Mr. Jones—don't do anything—let me talk."

"Open the door," Jarret ordered.

Senson's fumbling hands rattled the keys in the lock. The door swung back with a doleful creak of its hinges. Jarret pulled Senson inside, groped for the light switch, turned it. They were at the bottom of a long, straight flight of stairs.

"Up," said Jarret, closing the front door.

"Wait!" Senson said. "Mr. Jarret, please now. Listen to me. I didn't—I swear I didn't . . ."

Jarret hauled him up the stairs. "Wait until I accuse you of something before you start lying. You thought it would be very smart to send me out to Mama Boule's and then tip the cops off that I was there, didn't you?"

"No! I didn't! I swear—"

"How did you know Harkwith was after me?"

Senson gulped and said:

"He came in to *Willie's*. He questioned the waiters. One of them remembered you on account of your beard. He remembered that I had talked to you. Mr. Jarret, I swear I didn't tell him."

THEY were at the top of the stairs now, and Jarret pushed Senson toward the door that was slightly ajar. He held the man by the arm while he reached in and snapped the light switch and then pushed him inside the apartment.

It was a jumbled, cluttered living room with a massively huge center table and old-fashioned furniture that was ugly and dark and scarred. And on the far side of it, crouched against the wall and staring at them with dark, frightened eyes, was Dale Lee.

Jarret let go of Senson and straightened up. "You!" he said in blank astonishment. "What are you—"

Senson made the ugly, squealing sound of a trapped rat. He shoved hard against Jarret, and Jarret stumbled back a step. Senson slid past him, darted back for the door. Jarret got him by the back of his coat in one long lunge and hurled him sideways.

Senson bumped into the wall, but the same split-second he whirled around. His mouth was twisted into a fixed, terrorized snarl, and his teeth

glistened whitely. He raked at Jarret's face with stiffened fingers.

Jarret turned his head slightly, dodging. He swung his fist in a blurred arc, and he felt the hard knuckles bite into the softness of Senson's cheek. The blow was the same one that had downed Harkwith, and it spun Senson clear around and knocked him half across the table. He slid off on the floor in a lax crumpled heap.

Jarret faced Dale Lee. "What are you doing here?" He was breathing hard, but his voice sounded even and low.

Her face had a dead, white pallor. There was something about her eyes . . . They were out of focus. And Jarret suddenly realized that she was not looking at him, that she was not really seeing him at all. She was listening with tense, crawling concentration. Jarret could feel the big muscles tighten along his back.

"What are—you doing here?" he said. His tongue was thick in his mouth.

"I came to see Senson," she said dully. "He was bothering my sister. Someone hired him to get some letters that had been written to her by her fiance. He was following her, annoying her when she went out on the street. He even tried to see her at Mama Boule's. He kept talking about blackmail—as though my sister would try to blackmail anyone. And he got her discharged from her job."

"Who hired Senson?" Jarret asked. "Do you know? That's what I came to find out. That's what I have to know to be sure . . ."

"I don't know. I thought it might be the man who—was dead in your apartment. I saw him talking to Senson. That was when I heard your name. The man mentioned it—said he had no time for Senson, was going to see you and then leave town. Doris—my sister—wouldn't tell me who the man was. We—we had a quarrel when she came to the city. I thought—she was too young. I came here to get her and bring her back home and—and we quarreled again . . ."

The silence grew in the room until it was like a weight pressing against Jarret's ears—thick and ominous and freighted with some hidden threat.

Dale Lee said in a small, thin voice: "There's someone else here."

Jarret swung his head around. "What?"

Dale Lee said: "There's someone else here." Her voice rose hysterically. "There is! I just came before you got here! And I could feel—could feel eyes watching . . ."

THERE was a closed door on the other side of the room. Jarret saw it move now, just a little bit. No more than an inch, opening. Something round and metallic and glittering slid around the edge and pointed at him. It was the barrel of a revolver. It was the short, stubby barrel of a police revolver. There was a little spot on the edge of the muzzle where the bluing had been worn away.

Jarret's throat closed as he swallowed. He had seen that same worn spot earlier in the evening. He had noticed it on Harkwith's gun when he had picked it up off the floor after he had knocked Harkwith down.

Dale Lee gasped. She had seen the gun.

"You can—come out," Jarret said numbly. "I know who you are."

There was no answer, until the hammer of the revolver clicked softly.

Jarret forced the words out. "It had to be you. You were the only one with

a real motive. Only you appeared so naturally that no one thought . . . I didn't think . . ."

The seconds seemed to thump away like slow, dragging feet.

"Come out," said Jarret. "Come on out, Palmer."

The door didn't move, and the revolver barrel pointed steadily. Then Palmer's voice said:

"Well, Jarret! You're much cleverer than you look. How would *you* like a drink now? So sorry I can't offer you one. I know you've got a gun. Don't try to reach for it."

The perspiration was wetly cold on Jarret's face. "You were the one that was clever. You knew you would be the logical suspect, but you acted the thing out so well, I didn't even think of you for a long time. You even admitted you didn't like your uncle and that he didn't have any use for you. You just laughed it off. But it wasn't really a laughing matter, was it?"

"No," said Palmer. "No, it wasn't. Go ahead and talk, Jarret. I like to listen. I'm really a nice friendly fellow. I don't like to kill people. I don't like to have to kill you."

He laughed in a light, chuckling undertone.

"You were the one real suspect," Jarret said. "You could easily get a pass key that would fit my apartment from the clerk, by telling him you'd lost or mislaid your own. You quarreled with your uncle at *Willie's*, and he left. But you followed him and persuaded him to go to your apartment and talk it over. You parked in the garage and went up the service elevator. No one saw you. Then you strangled your uncle and used your pass key to put him in my apartment. After that you went out again and came back, pretending to be drunk, and let Murtha pick you up. I don't know why you killed him."

"He came snooping up the fire escape," Palmer said. "He was still after that wallet. He knew it had plenty in it. He'd looked, and I had just lifted all of Uncle Casper's cash. Murtha saw me through the window. He knew I wasn't drunk. I hit him with a bookend, pushed him off."

"You wanted an alibi, then," Jarret said stiffly. "So you came down to my apartment. Dale Lee heard your voice, and she went out the back way, by the fire escape. She screamed, not Murtha . . ."

"Yes," said Dale Lee. "I—stumbled over him." She looked at Jarret appealingly. "I'm sorry I ran away. But I was afraid—of involving my sister."

"Then," said Jarret to Palmer, "when you got out of the closet, you went to Mama Boule's, and . . ." He stopped, watching Dale Lee.

She knew. Jarret could see by the sudden black horror in her eyes.

"Doris," she whispered.

Jarret nodded once, reluctantly. "Yes. Doris, too."

Dale Lee didn't cry out, and she didn't move. She stood in stunned silence for a long moment, and then she put one hand up over her eyes.

"That's all," said Palmer. "And you've talked about enough. I'm sorry, but I'm in a bit of a hurry. To make it clear, you see I'm Uncle Casper's one and only heir. I hadn't seen the old coot for years, and I was hoping every day I'd hear he'd done the only decent thing he could do—kicked off and left his money to someone who could use it. But, no. The old boy had to make a surprise visit. He didn't like what he found. He was going to disinherit me just as soon as he got back to Nevada. So I saw that he didn't get there. It

was really partly your fault, Jarret. That was one of the reasons he came. I was telling the truth. He was so cracked he wanted you to do some carving on his private mountain. Sort of a perpetual memorial to dear Casper—something for the tourists to gape at."

"And Doris Lee?" Jarret inquired tightly. He was very stiff, holding himself rigidly still by a tremendous effort.

There was one step in the long stairway up to the apartment that had creaked when he and Senson had come up.

That same step had just creaked again, very softly and stealthily.

"Oh, her," said Palmer carelessly. "I met her at *Willie's*. Got very fond of her, really. I was thinking of marrying her, and I wrote her some letters to that effect. She had a good job, you see, and I was strapped for money. But then, when Uncle Casper turned up, I stalled her off to see if I couldn't talk the old boy out of something. She didn't like that, so I gave Senson a story about blackmail, and hired him to trail her around, and get my letters. She kept getting to be more and more of a bother. After all, I couldn't have her bringing me into court or anything like that. Oh, she was a pretty nice kid in a way, but dumb. That kind always fall in love with me if I want 'em to. The only trouble is they're sort of hard to get rid of afterward. Make nuisances of themselves. Get all wrought up and cause trouble. I went to see her tonight. She wouldn't listen . . ."

THE front door hadn't made the slightest sound opening behind Jarret, but when it closed the latch clicked lightly.

"All right, Jarret," Harkwith's cold, flat voice said. "Have you got my gun handy? If you have, just drag it out and turn around."

The door that hid Palmer moved a little as he turned the barrel of the police revolver to cover Harkwith. Jarret dove straight forward, head down, his big shoulder lowered. The report of the revolver was smashing thunder in his ears, and the powder flare burned a streak across the side of his face.

He hit the door with a thrusting lunge, felt it smash back into Palmer. Jarret went to his knees, half in the room. Palmer was a looming shadow just ahead of him, and the gun suddenly crashed almost in his face, blinding him, and he felt the bullet twitch at his sleeve.

Groping, he fell forward, and one of his hands closed around Palmer's ankle. Palmer screamed in a high, frightened voice. Jarret jerked his feet from under him, and they rolled over on the floor and over again, and then Jarret got hold of the police revolver by its barrel with his left hand. He jerked his right hand loose and struck at Palmer's face again and again with his fist.

A berserk fury possessed him. He could have wrenched the revolver free with his left hand and used it as a club, but in this moment he scorned any weapon but his fist, and his hard knuckles, roughened by years of work with chisel and stone, pummeled like a fast-working piston into the evilly handsome face of the murderer.

The light snapped on.

"That'll be all," Harkwith said flatly. "Save a little of his face. The boys will want to take pictures of him down to that station."

Palmer began to blubber in weakly incoherent moans. Jarret sat up slowly and rubbed at his eyes. Harkwith

looked like a vague, looming shadow in the doorway.

"Well," said Harkwith, "you just been havin' lots of fun. . . . Hey! That's my gun you took away from him. Where'd he get that?"

"I don't know," Jarret said wearily. "I left it on the table like I told you I would."

"Hell!" Harkwith swore. "That's it. I busted down the door, and I fell all over the floor when it let go. He got the gun while I was pickin' myself up. What's the matter with him? Has he got the shakes?"

Jarret's eyes were streaming tears, and he blinked them rapidly, trying to clear his vision. "He killed Doris Lee, and Murtha, and his uncle."

"Him!" Harkwith exclaimed. "Him! Why, what're you—"

"He confessed," Jarret said. "Dale Lee—the girl in the other room—and I both heard him. He'll confess again. He talks big when he has the upper hand, but he's yellow."

"Oh," said Harkwith. He was silent for a moment, thinking it over, and then he drew in a deep breath. "Why, how the hell do I get to call myself a detective? Talk about lame brains! Me! Why, he tipped me off, and I didn't even know it. That whiskey, now. When we were in the closet, he did an awful lot of gurgling with that bottle, but when we came out there was just as much whiskey there as before we went in! He didn't drink a bit. He was just pretending! And I noticed it, and even then I didn't get wise!"

"You were right about the scream, too," Jarret said, getting slowly to his feet. "It was a woman—Dale Lee—who screamed, not Murtha. She screamed because she stumbled over his body. Palmer hit Murtha on the head *before* he threw him off the fire escape."

"Hell," said Harkwith, disgusted. "I was so mad at you I couldn't think about anybody else. You socked me once, now you ought to kick me a good one."

"No," Jarret said. "I don't feel like —kicking anyone."

He was standing in the doorway looking at Dale Lee. She was sitting on the couch with her hands covering her face, and her whole slender body was shaking with spasmodic sobs. Jarret went over and sat down beside her. After a moment he put his arm around her shoulders.

"Well!" said Harkwith, staring at them.

Neither of them paid any attention to him at all. He cleared his throat loudly and then said: "Well, I guess I'd better call the station or something, I guess. . . ."

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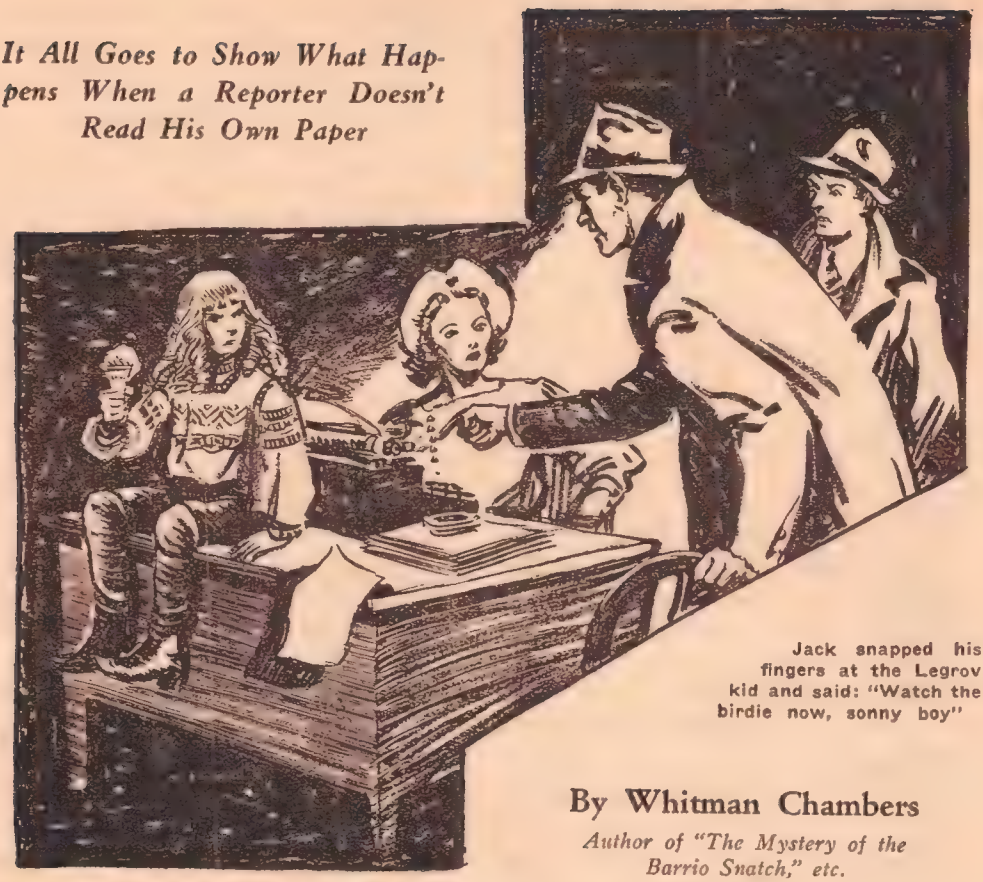

Jack snapped his fingers at the Legrov kid and said: "Watch the birdie now, sonny boy"

By Whitman Chambers

Author of "The Mystery of the Barrio Snatch," etc.

The Little Stranger from Poland

THE murder broke at a very inopportune time.

You see, Jeff Gervin, our local AP man, was celebrating a birthday and one of our better bail bond brokers had sent in a keg of beer. Quite an army of dicks, harness bulls, firemen and loafers from the various City Hall offices had gathered in the press room to help Jeff kill the keg.

The party was just getting good when Miss Jane Tobin, known to her loyal reporters on the *Morning Star* as the Lady, steamed into the room and confronted Katie Blayne, who covers day police for the *Star*. There was a smudge of ink on the Lady's chin, only one side of her nose was powdered and her peach basket hat of another era was, as usual, cock-eyed.

"Katie, my dear, a beer bust!"

The Duchess blushed and didn't try to say anything.

"And you didn't invite me," Miss Tobin went on, her sarcasm heavy enough to chop with a cleaver. "You know how I love beer busts. Particularly during working hours. They're such a relief from the monotony of reporting the silly old news."

Jeff Gervin snorted, elbowed a couple of dicks out of the way and confronted the Lady.

"Look here, Queen Victoria! Hasn't anybody ever wised you that a City Hall press room is reserved for reporters? City editors, even *female* city editors, don't come around here spying on their employees. Now why don't you take a powder?"

"Yes, get her a powder somebody," lanky Pete Zerker of the *Bulletin* drawled. "Cyanide if possible."

Miss Tobin ignored them.

"Now look here, Katie. This fraternizing has got to stop. There's all too much brotherly love in this press room and all too few exclusive stories for the *Star*. From now on I want at least a beat a day. If you can't put the screws on this crew of beer-guzzling, half-baked cubs, you'd better come back into the office and write obits and church news."

The Lady tilted her absurd hat from her left ear to her right, swept us with a final withering glare and stalked from the room. The Duchess looked dazed and very red.

Plump, fat-cheeked Willie Blake of the *Sentinel* grinned and said cheerfully:

"Don't take it to heart, Duchess."

"Forget it, Katie," lanky, long-faced Pete Zerker drawled pleasantly. "Don't worry, we're not going to start any throat-cutting in this press room."

"Sure, kid," I said. "Don't let that old harridan—"

"Stop right there, Pinky Kane." Katie's chin was up now and her beautiful wide-set violet eyes were sparkling dangerously. "That old harridan, as you call her, is the finest friend I ever had and the best city editor, man, woman or boy, in seventeen countries. And while we're on the subject, get me right. You heard her orders and if you know me, you know I'm taking program."

And she marched out of the press room.

WELL, we burned for a while and discussed several plans for holding out the news on the Duchess and putting her in her place. The cops and politicians killed the beer and drifted on about their business.

About 5:30, I went upstairs to the detective bureau on the off chance that something might have popped, though the dicks are pretty good about flashing us when a story breaks. Jerry Donovan, who was on the desk, said:

"Thought you'd be out to Legrov's."

"Who's Legrov?"

"The junk man."

"I don't want any junk today. What's the angle?"

"Didn't Katie tell you?"

"What should Katie have told me?"

Donovan shook his head. "You reporters! Always playing tricks. And Katie seems like such a nice girl, too. She promised me she'd run right down to the press room and tell all the boys."

"Listen, Jerry! That girl would shoot her own grandmother if she thought she could do it exclusively for the *Morning Star*. Now I have a dead-line in twenty minutes. Will you get the story off your chest, or will I have to blast?"

"Sure, Pinky, sure. About an hour ago somebody phoned in that this Andre Legrov—you know the guy?"

"Never heard of him."

"Well, your paper had a big story in the Sunday supplement a couple of months ago. It was called 'By Rags to Riches' and it told how this guy had started up in the junk business a few years ago, and how he branched out into the scrap iron racket, and how the

market for scrap sky-rocketed on account of some country buying so much getting ready for a war, and how he made a million dollars and—"

"All right, *all right!* What happened to him?"

Donovan looked sad. "Killed himself. Captain Meek and Manelli went out on it and they haven't come back."

"Captain Meek, huh? That doesn't sound like a run-of-the-mill suicide. Sure it wasn't murder?"

"Well, I dunno. Maybe it was. Perhaps you better get out to Fourth and Myrtle."

I ran out, piled into my car and took off.

LEGROV'S junk yard was on the bay front. It covered several acres, surrounded by a high board fence. I pulled up in front of the office, a one-story unpainted shack. Inside I found Manelli talking to three rather white-faced and dazed looking clerks.

"What's the dope, Joe?" I asked.

Manelli took a puff on his cigar and queried casually: "Didn't Katie tell you?"

I snorted; I was getting a bit sick of that question.

"She drove off in a cab with the little kid," the dick went on. "Said she'd buy him a soda and get him calmed down while Captain Meek took the dame to the Hall for questioning."

"What dame and what little kid?" I demanded. "And where's the body?"

"I guess you ain't seen Katie." Manelli jerked his head toward a closed door at the back of the main office. "Legrov's in there. This dame, Marie Legrov, that the captain took to the Hall, is one of his wives."

"Yeah? How many wives did he have?"

"Only two," Manelli said. "The other one, the one he lived with, we ain't been able to locate. Her name is Rose. This first one, Marie—"

"Start—at—the—beginning!"

"Oke." Manelli took a long drag, waved his stogie at one of the clerks. "Felton, here, phoned us at 4:52 that Legrov had shot himself. Me and the captain rushed out and found this woman, Marie, in hysterics and her little kid, he's about seven, yelling his head off. In Polish. Yeah. The little shaver don't speak American.

"Well, here was the dame's story. Legrov and this Marie used to be in the street carnival business and they've known each other since they were kids. About eight years ago they bumped together in some small town in Poland. Marie had gone home to see her ma and pa and Legrov was over there on some kind of business. Selling rags, I think.

"Anyway, he married her and left her there with her folks while he come back to the U. S. to make his fortune. He made the fortune but he never sent for her, only sent her a little money every few months. In the meantime, according to these people here, who never heard of Marie, he married this other dame.

"You know that article your paper ran a couple of months ago? Well, one of Marie's big-hearted carnival friends sends her a clipping. So Marie gathers up the kid—he was born a few months after Legrov left Poland—and hotfoots it here. She got in this afternoon, she says, and came right down here with the kid.

"She went into Legrov's private office and talked to him for a long time. Then she came out and slammed the door and picked up a phone. She tells us she was going to phone the police and have Legrov arrested for bigamy.

She was pretty hysterical, the men say.

"Anyway, while she had the phone in her hand, they heard a shot in the private office. They ran to the door and found Legrov had locked it after she went out. But there's another door that opens out back, onto the junk yard. They all rushed around the building and in through that door. Legrov was laying on the floor. There was a .45 beside him and a big hole in his head and the kid was yelling bloody murder, or however they say it in Polish. It looked like suicide and they gave us a buzz.

"Well, me and the captain get here and look over the body and what do we see? The guy is shot in the left side of the head. First thing I do—and you see that I get credit for this, you lug!—the first thing I do I ask the office force if Legrov was left-handed. He wasn't. So-o-o . . ."

"So what?"

"Murder has been done, my lad."

"A brilliant deduction. But the kid was in the room, wasn't he? What did he have to say about it?"

"The kid didn't have nothing to say. He only yelled. Finally we put the bee on his mother to pipe him down and she got him quiet after a lot of palaver. She says the kid tells her that a big tall man walked in that back entrance from the junk yard, shot Legrov and run out. That's the only description we could get out of him. Just a big tall guy."

"Didn't any of the men working in the junk yard see this big guy?"

"There weren't any men working in the junk yard. They quit at four-thirty. These men here in the office quit at five, when the watchman comes on the job."

"H-m. Timed, huh?"

"Looks like it. Anyway, the medical examiner is on his way, along with a couple of boys from the homicide squad. Something may crack when they get here. I'm only a second class dick holding down the fort. You want to see the body?"

"Certainly I want to see the body."

"Well, Katie was in and looked at him, so I guess you can go in. But see you don't touch nothing."

I SHOVED open the door. It was a small dingy office with only a flat desk, three chairs and a water cooler. Legrov lay on his right side in front of the desk. He was a big man with a long curving nose, thin lips and almost no hair on his swarthy head. There was a hole in his temple and his right cheek lay in a pool of congealing blood. On the floor beside him lay the .45 and a heavy cane.

"Who belongs to the cane?" I asked.

"The men here say it was Legrov's. He had a limp. We figure he run around the desk and tried to defend himself before he got it in the head."

"For a guy who doesn't know the score, you do a lot of figuring. Gimme a phone."

As I dialed my office, I saw two of the men on the murder detail hurry in, followed by Willie and Pete and Jeff.

"There's our pal," Jeff growled. "What's the idea, Pink? You caught the disease from the Duchess?"

"Yes, Pinky, why didn't you flash us?" Pete asked aggrievedly.

"I was in a hurry. Your afternoon rags are all in bed anyway. Now shut up and let me try to talk myself out from behind the eight ball."

My city editor came on the line with: "Commence! And if it's Kane, you're fired!"

"Now take it easy, Andy. I've got a hot murder."

"Yeah? So's the *Star*. They just

came on the street with an extra. Where'n hell you been?"

Could I tell him I'd been sitting around the press room drinking beer, while Katie Blayne was out sewing up the best murder that had broken in a year?

"I been working, Andy, and I've got the whole story. And if you'll have Jack Frost meet me at the City Hall right away, I'll promote a flock of pictures. Now here's the dope."

JACK FROST, our sour-faced No. 1 camera man, met me as per schedule in front of the Hall. I briefed the story and we went into the press room, which was deserted except for Katie and a kid of about seven.

"How's it, Duchess?" I greeted her. "It was very clever of you to hide him here. But not clever enough."

I looked at the Legrov kid. As he sat there on the edge of Katie's desk licking an ice cream cone, I felt kind of sorry for him. He was so indubitably not an American boy. His hair, instead of being short, hung in yellow curls to his shoulders. His pants, instead of being long and loose, came only to his knees and were almost skin tight. With his flowered red blouse, long black stockings and high black shoes, he looked like the vintage of 1908.

I turned to Jack Frost. "I want this kid shot from every angle, I want at least a dozen pix. And they'd better be good."

"Brother, if I take 'em they won't be good, they'll be perfect."

Frost unlimbered his gear, set up his tripod and put a lamp in his flash gun. The Legrov kid watched the proceedings with sulky eyes. Jack stepped behind his camera, snapped his fingers.

"Watch the birdie now, sonny boy."

Jack should have watched the kid, for when he bent for an instant to adjust his lens, the young man from Poland hurled his cone with unerring aim into Jack's face. The cameraman sputtered, clawed strawberry ice cream from his face.

"Listen! Am I photographer," he growled, "or a stooge for a custard pie comedian? How about warming that brat's pants?"

"You'll do no such thing, Jack Frost!" Katie cried. "And I wish you'd shoot your pictures and get out of here. He's been through enough today. You, Pinky Kane, call off your half-wit camera man."

"And you, Katie Blayne, go climb a tree. Jack, take those pictures."

Maybe the kid didn't speak English, but he certainly knew the score. He turned on as fine a tantrum as you'd see outside of a Park Avenue kindergarten. And while he yelled and screamed and passed out a line of Polish that sounded suspiciously like blasphemy, Jack Frost exposed plate after plate. The kid was still going strong when Jack packed his outfit and departed. And Katie was close to hysterics herself by the time the youngster's mother came on the scene.

The woman who claimed to have married Andre Legrov and to have borne him this spoiled darling spoke about six short sharp words, and the lad subsided like somebody had turned off the juice.

"He's so high strung," Mrs. Legrov said, speaking with only a slight foreign accent. "And then—the shock—this afternoon."

You could see the woman was near the cracking point too as she put her arm around the kid and patted his shoulder. She was about forty years old and might once have been pretty

in a blond Slavic way. Now she only looked hard, and a little faded, and her green eyes were restless and much too bright.

"They've sent for an interpreter to question Johnnie," she told us in a nasal whine. "I don't know why they don't trust me, but I guess all cops are suspicious. I know he can't tell 'em much, either. He was so frightened, and he's such a child, and everything here in America is so strange to him. And then—" she looked down at the kid and blinked hard "—he ain't a bright boy. I tried to learn him English, but he couldn't ever remember a word of it."

After a while one of the dicks came in and took the woman and the boy up to the detective bureau for more questioning.

"Look here, Katie," I said. "Did you get a whiff of fish out there at the junk yard?"

The Duchess considered for a minute or so; finally she shook her head. "I know what you're thinking, Pinky. But it's impossible. The woman was in the outer office when the shot was fired. The door between the two rooms was closed and, as they discovered afterward, locked. There were three men in that office with her, watching her because they knew something was in the wind. So far as we know, those men are reliable. Captain Meek questioned them thoroughly and they all told the same story, agreed on all the details. No, that woman didn't kill him."

"Do you suppose she was really married to him?"

"She has a lot of papers to prove it; she showed them to the Captain. Of course, they're in Polish but it will be easy enough to have them translated. Yes, she was married to him, all right."

A LITTLE later Sergeant Boyle of the homicide squad came into the press room and told us that the number had been filed off the .45 and the fingerprints on it were too smudged to be of use. Marie Legrov and her son had been released. The boy, questioned by an interpreter, had had hysterics and could offer little information. "A great big man with a black stick that made a big noise." That's all they got out of him.

"Elton Smith," the Sergeant volunteered, "is a big man."

"Don't hold out on us," I said. "Who's Elton Smith?"

"He's sort of a silent partner of Legrov's. He put up the money to buy the string of shipping board freighters that Legrov has been cutting up and selling. They had a misunderstanding over the profits not long ago."

"Have you located him?" Katie asked.

"No. He left the *Chadwick Arms,* where he lives, about two o'clock this afternoon and hasn't been seen since."

"And how about the other Mrs. Legrov?" I queried.

"According to the servants, Elton Smith called for her about two-thirty and they drove off in Smith's car."

"It sounds," I said, "like a hot lead."

"The longer it takes to locate that pair," Sergeant Boyle agreed, "the hotter it will be."

WELL, it didn't take long to locate them. About eight that evening Smith and Rose Legrov presented themselves at the detective bureau. They had been, they said, aimlessly driving around out in the country enjoying the spring weather. They'd had dinner at a roadhouse and had returned to the city about 7:30, where they had learned of Legrov's death and had

come immediately to police headquarters.

They could not recall exactly where they had been at 4:50 that afternoon. Just aimlessly wandering around the country, they said. No, they had no alibi. Yes, it would have been possible for Smith to have slipped through the junk yard, into Legrov's private office by way of the back door, shot him, locked the connecting door to the front office and escaped.

Smith and Legrov were grilled until midnight and then locked up. "We'll hold them on an open charge until morning," Captain Meek announced. "Then we'll see if the Legrov youngster can pick this bird Smith out of a line-up."

I OVERSLEPT the next morning and didn't get to the press room until nearly 8:30. Jeff Gervin, Willie Blake and Pete Zerker were already on the job.

"Anything new?" I asked.

"Our lovely Duchess has gone after the first Mrs. Legrov and the chee-ild with a carload of dicks," Jeff Gervin volunteered.

"Why the Duchess?" I asked. "Aren't the dicks able to collar a woman and a kid and bring them to the Hall?"

Pete Zerker shrugged his thin stooped shoulders. "Katie went along at the request of Mrs. Legrov. The kid seems to like our Katie."

"I'm glad," I said, "somebody likes her."

"Besides you," Jeff Gervin cracked.

I let that pass as being too juvenile to take up and opened my copy of the *Telegram*. I was looking over Jack Frost's pictures, which covered half of Page 2 and were captioned *Legrov's son in hysterics after seeing father shot,* when Willie Blake yelled from the window:

"Here they come!"

Conscious of a mounting excitement out of all proportion to the importance of the situation, I hurried to the window and looked out over Willie's shoulder.

"I wonder if the kid realizes he holds a man's life in his hands," Pete Zerker mused.

The Duchess, Mrs. Legrov, the boy and three dicks were filing into the Hall.

We couldn't horn in.

We all sat down after a while and gave a poor imitation of four men keeping calm.

Willie was the first to fidget. "What do you think, Pinky?"

"I think the kid's mother bumped Legrov. But don't ask me how."

"What about you, Pete?"

"Smith did it," Zerker decreed.

"Jeff?"

"Don't be dumb, you lugs. Katie did it."

Ten minutes later a phone rang. Willie Blake grabbed it.

"Yeah," Willie said. "Yeah. . . . Yeah. . . . Yeah. . . Oke!"

He jiggled the hook, got an outside operator and barked the *Sentinel's* number.

"Dish it, Willie!" Jeff Gervin ordered.

"The kid picked Smith out of a line-up of ten men," Willie told us crisply. "Rose Legrov, who was waiting in the next room, went out like a light when they told her. Smith says the kid's a half-wit—"

"He's probably right," Jeff grunted.

"—and swears he wasn't within twenty miles of the junk yard yesterday afternoon. . . . Hello, Pearl! Gimme the desk! Snappy, kid!"

WE had all finished phoning the latest break to our offices when the Lady came in. She didn't walk in, like a lady should. She tumbled in, as though some one had kicked open the door and tossed her into the rom and she had landed, by a miracle, on her feet.

Jeff Gervin looked her over with a jaundiced eye. "Drunk again, Miss Tobin?" he asked.

"Shut up!" the Lady snapped, and jammed her queer hat a little lower on her ears.

"Where's Katie?"

"She's out flying a kite," Willie Blake replied promptly.

"Pinky Kane, where is Katie?" Miss Tobin demanded.

I realized the Lady was worked up to a high pitch of excitement. Now there's a time for horse play and a time for horse sense, and I said, "Katie is upstairs with the Legrov kid. He's just identified Elton Smith as the man who killed his father."

"It was Smith, was it?" Miss Tobin looked skeptical.

"The boy picked him out of a line-up," Pete told her.

"Well, he could have been coached, couldn't he?" Miss Tobin retorted. "Smith's picture was in the *Sun* this morning."

She fell to pacing the room nervously. Willie Blake finally cracked:

"I see, Miss Tobin, you're reading a good paper for a change."

The Lady jerked a folded newspaper from beneath her left arm and shoved it under her right, and went on walking the floor. The paper, I saw, was the last edition of the *Telegram*. And that was passing strange, because I knew Jane Tobin ordinarily wouldn't be found dead with a copy of the *Telegram* in her hand.

At last Katie came in towing the Legrov boy.

"That kid again!" Jeff Gervin snorted. "Look, Duchess. Is this a press room or a kindergarten?"

Katie said wearily: "Captain Meek wants to question his mother some more. I told him I'd take care of—" She saw the Lady, started, gulped and managed a surprised "Good morning, Miss Tobin."

"What's the idea of leaving the beat at a time like this?" the Lady demanded.

"Why—" Katie began, flushing.

"Never mind, never *mind!* Drop that kid and come here."

Katie let go of the boy's hand and followed Miss Tobin to the far corner of the room. The kid glared at the rest of us. His mouth was sulky and there was a mean look in his eyes. Yes, mean. I like kids, but I couldn't get steamed up over this one.

Miss Tobin had spread the *Telegram* on a desk and opened it to Page 2. She leaned over it, whispering hoarsely to Katie. Katie looked startled, bent closer to the page. I heard her gasp.

Then she stood erect and, without a word, the two women turned. The room, now, was dead quiet. The air was so electric with tension I could feel my scalp crawl. I looked at the little stranger from Poland. We all looked at him.

He was standing motionless. His mouth was open and slack. And there was terror, sheer terror, in his eyes.

THE Lady strode forward. There was about her short and sturdy figure a grim relentless determination that, in a woman, was almost shocking. She stopped a pace from the kid.

"Take it off!" Her husky voice lashed like a blacksnake.

The little guy started to shake.

"Take it off, I say!"

He raised a trembling hand and pulled off the wig of yellow curls. And all at once I felt sorry for him, because it kind of gets you to see a man cry, and this man was crying.

He was standing there with the crumpled wig in his hand; his mouth was tortured and tears were running down his cheeks. He didn't try to wipe them away as he moaned:

"I never went there to kill him. I *had* to kill him. He was tryin' to brain me with his cane."

The Lady said grimly: "But you had the gun hidden in your blouse."

"I wouldn't go down there without it. I knew Legrov, see? I was in show business with him years ago. I was afraid he'd reco'nize me. And I knew what a temper he had." The little man gulped. "Well, he spotted me, all right, even if he ain't seen me for nine years. He spotted me even with this trick outfit and them curls. He locked the door an' came at me with a cane. He got in one crack before I let him have it. Look!"

He lowered his head and we all gravely examined an ugly ridge on his brown-haired crown.

"What was your racket?" Miss Tobin asked. "A shake-down?"

"Sure a shake-down. Marie was married to Legrov, all right, just like she said. Only he divorced her in Paris later. She claims the divorce wasn't legal because she wasn't served with no papers, but I wouldn't know about that.

"Well, she heard he'd made a lot of dough and married again. So she cooked up this shake-down routine and come back to the U.S. and put it up to me to pose as their kid, thinkin' that way she'd have a better chance of rookin' him out of a good piece of change. She knew me when she was in show business. She knew I was born in Poland and speak the language, and she thought it would be better if I pretended I didn't know no English. Legrov's Polish was rusty and he couldn't talk to me so much and maybe catch me up. And then we figured I might queer myself if I tried to talk like a seven-year-old American kid.

"Well, I ain't had a booking since I worked in the midget village at the San Diego Fair. So I put in with her and this is what she steered me into. But I never went there to kill him. I had to do it, else he'd have spilled my brains all over the jernt."

The words had tumbled out so fast he'd hardly had time to breathe. Now he swallowed a few times and rubbed the sleeve of his absurd red blouse across his eyes.

"Look!" he gasped suddenly. "You think I'll burn for this?"

The Lady took a deep unsteady breath. "Not a chance. With that crack you got on the head, and the cane that was found beside the body, and Legrov's known temper, you have a pretty fair out. I say pretty fair. You weren't in Legrov's office on any mission of good will and you may have to do a few years on a second degree murder rap. But you won't burn—if you come clean."

"I'll come clean, lady. So help me. I'm sorry I picked that guy Smith out of the line-up, but it looked like my only out. I feel better now. Gimme a cigarette, somebody."

Jeff handed him a cigarette. I turned to Miss Tobin and said:

"One of those pictures in the *Telegram* gave you the tip-off."

She smiled. Her eyes were still bright with excitement. She was pretty

proud of herself, and uncommonly friendly.

"Yes. In one of them his curls were brushed back over his left ear. You could see his dark clipped hair. But you, I suppose, thought it was only a shadow."

The little guy was inhaling deep drags from his cigarette. He looked, now that he had unburdened himself, just a bit cocky and not at all like a killer.

"Pretty good act I put on when I threw that fit yesterday, huh?" he said cheerfully. "I didn't want my picture spread all over the papers. Millions of people have seen me in shows and I was afraid somebody might reco'nize me. But that camera guy shot me just the same. Well, that's life. Let's go up and brace the skipper."

And then all at once the show was over and Willie and Jeff and Pete remembered they were newspaper reporters. The three of them leaped for the phone booths. And the Lady's jaw dropped.

"Katie, you can plant me for a dahlia bulb," she groaned, tilting the peach basket she calls a hat onto her left ear. "Am I a newspaper woman or should I be manicuring floors? Here I've cracked this story, busted the case all over the landscape—*for the afternoon papers!*"

Katie looked at me and smiled. I looked at Katie and winked. You see, I kind of like the Lady, too.

Libraries Curb Crime

AUSTIN H. MACCORMICK, New York Commissioner of Correction, has great faith in libraries as an important factor in crime prevention work. Eighty per cent of the men serving short-term sentences on Rikers Island, he said, consistently used the library there, even during a thirty-day term.

A large amount could be done in the field of crime prevention—not by handing out "goody" books, but by providing interesting volumes that do not moralize, and that lead a boy or man into avenues of vocational interest, says Mr. MacCormick.

F. J. Rowan of the Pennsylvania Industrial School Library also offers testimony on the efficacy of good literature by relating how one boy designated as a dementia praecox case by a prison psychiatrist was so entranced by Keats' *Ode to a Grecian Urn* that he absorbed all the poems of that author and turned to other volumes in the library, to which he had been assigned. When released he was declared to be no longer psychopathic, and has established himself in a department store job, with a small business on the side.

During 1927-28, when he visited all the adult institutions in the country, Mr. MacCormick found libraries almost as inaccessible as the prison arsenal, patronized only by a handful of prisoners so desperate for reading matter "that they would have tried to read Greek upside down and backwards."

"I seldom found a library much better than a miscellaneous collection of cast-offs from public libraries—not meaning to deprecate these, either, for such are tremendously valuable to us—but supported by such drippings from appropriations already wrung dry for 'practical' purposes, as feeding of hogs on the prison farm or to provide horseshoes." But much has been done in recent years, and prisoners are faring better.

—*Michael O'Hara*

ILLUSTRATED
The Man From the Panhandle
THE 1919 OIL BOOM IN TEXAS WAS A MAGNET FOR THE WORLD'S FINEST SWINDLING TALENT. SEVEN OF THESE CONFIDENCE MEN MADE THE MISTAKE OF SWINDLING A BLUE-EYED RANCHER FROM THE PANHANDLE— J. FRANK NORFLEET....
OFFICE
..THE RANCHER WAS IN FT. WORTH ON BUSINESS WHEN HE FELL FOR THE "DROPPED WALLET" TRICK IN A HOTEL LOBBY. THE OWNER OF THE WALLET, GRATEFUL FOR ITS RETURN, OFFERED TO ADMIT NORFLEET TO A SURE THING IN STOCK SPECULATION.
THROUGH FAKE STOCK WIRES, NORFLEET WAS FIRST LED TO BELIEVE THAT HE HAD WON AND WAS THEN INDUCED TO PUT UP $45,000 TO MAKE A "CLEAN-UP." THE SWINDLERS DISAPPEARED WITH HIS MONEY.
NORFLEET RETURNED TO HIS HOME AT HALE CENTRE, MORTGAGED HIS RANCH TO FINANCE HIS MANHUNT. HE BUCKLED ON HIS SIX-SHOOTER AND RODE OFF ON THE LONG TRAIL. AS HE LEFT, HIS WIFE CUPPED HER HANDS TO HER MOUTH AND SHOUTED AFTER HIM: "BRING THEM BACK ALIVE IF YOU CAN, BUT DON'T LET THEM GET AWAY."
OFFICE
1902
DOGGEDLY, NORFLEET TRACED THE SWINDLERS TO DALLAS WHERE HE CORNERED THEM IN AN OFFICE AND, AT THE POINT OF A GUN, DEMANDED HIS MONEY BACK. THE CROOKS PROMISED TO RETURN IT BUT AS SOON AS THE RANCHER LEFT, THEY DISAPPEARED AGAIN.

Coming Next Week

CRIMES
CROOKS TACKLED THE WRONG MAN WHEN THEY FLEECED THIS TEXAS RANCHER.
UNDAUNTED, NORFLEET ONCE MORE SET OUT ON THE TRAIL. HE TRACED ONE OF THE BAND, JOE FUREY, TO CALIFORNIA WHERE HE HAD HIM ARRESTED. FUREY, HOWEVER, WAS ALLOWED TO ESCAPE AND NORFLEET AGAIN TOOK UP THE CHASE. THIS TIME IT LED 4000 MILES TO FLORIDA WHERE HE CAPTURED FUREY AFTER A FIGHT.
J. FRANK NORFLEET
ONE BY ONE, THE TEXAN TRACKED DOWN FOUR OTHERS OF THE GANG, IN A HUNT THAT LASTED FOUR YEARS AND CARRIED HIM OVER 14,000 MILES. THE SEVENTH MEMBER WAS ARRESTED IN SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, AND IDENTIFIED BY A PICTURE SENT OUT BY NORFLEET. "THE GUY AINT HUMAN," SAID ONE OF THE CROOKS AND GAVE HIMSELF UP. ALL THE SWINDLERS WERE CONVICTED ON EVIDENCE OF THE LITTLE RANCHER WHO HAD BEEN THEIR VICTIM.
NORFLEET RETURNED HOME SATISFIED, ALTHOUGH HE HAD LOST TWO FORTUNES — ONE PLUCKED FROM HIM BY THE CROOKS AND THE OTHER SPENT IN TRACKING THEM DOWN. ON HIS RETURN TO TEXAS, HE CONTINUED TO SERVE AS A DEPUTY SHERIFF AND MEMBER OF THE FAMOUS TEXAS RANGERS, AND BUILT UP A RECORD OF CAPTURING 82 FUGITIVES. IN ALL OF HIS CAPTURES, HE REMEMBERED THE ADVICE OF HIS WIFE AND BROUGHT THEM IN ALIVE.

"Red" Hope's Parole

The four masked men came to the coffin in which Mark was imprisoned

MURDER C. O. D.

By Fred MacIsaac

Author of "Jewels of Doom," "The Murder Special," etc.

Could There Be Any Worse Experience Than Being Buried Alive?

WHAT HAS HAPPENED

MARK MASTERSON was up against it. He owed nearly everybody in town. And this despite the fact that his Uncle Rodney, who had paid his way through Yale, and Harvard Law School, was giving him an allowance of fifty dollars a week until Mark could get a law practice established.

The trouble with Mark was that he was too socially eligible. He went places and did things with people who spent a lot of money.

One morning in the mail Mark finds an unusual communication. It says that he may come into a large sum within a month if he agrees to pay to the Golconda Company—address General Delivery, New York City—25 per cent. Thinking he has nothing to lose, Mark signs an agreement and mails it.

Soon after, he is shocked to hear that his Uncle Rodney has been killed in a plane crash. A voice identifying itself with the Golconda Company informs him over the telephone that he is expected to remit 25 per cent of the five million dollars to which he falls heir. And Herbert Porter, the executor of the estate, tells Mark that

This story began in *Detective Fiction Weekly* for Sept. 18

the cause of the plane wreck apparently was a time bomb.

Mark confides the incident of the Golconda Company to a young friend who is a priest, Father Rothman. And "Bill" Rothman tells Mark that he has heard of a similar incident: a young man made such an agreement with an Eldorado company, and soon after, the young man's father was killed, leaving a hundred thousand dollars insurance.

"It looks like a murder syndicate, Mark," says Father Rothman.

A BAD feature of the situation is that the letter which Mark Masterson received from the Golconda Company was written with disappearing ink, so he has only a blank sheet of paper as evidence.

However, when he receives a warning to pay up immediately, he has a witnessed photostat made.

Claribel Yates, a young person of the plump and pleasing variety, is engaged as Mark's secretary, and a curious circumstance appears. Miss Yates says she has been fired by her previous employer, Mr. Jackson Johnson of the World Renowned Newspaper Syndicate, because he was irked by the fact that she had used a special ink from his desk to write a letter to her mother in Rochester, and her mother, receiving only a blank sheet of paper, had returned it to Claribel. Jackson Johnson had told Claribel that he was merely conducting a chemical experiment with this special ink—nevertheless he had been annoyed to the extent of firing her.

Mark goes to see Jackson Johnson, pretending to be an applicant for a job. He learns nothing, and afterward Bill Rothman upbraids Mark for being so childish in showing his hand.

The next morning Mark wakes up with a peculiar eerie feeling. He is touching something cold. He leaps out of bed and stares, horrified. He has been sleeping with a corpse.

POLICE identify the body as that of a jeweler, Julius Steinwold. Mark has never heard of the man, and has no idea as to how the corpse came to be in bed with him. He decides the murder syndicate is responsible, trying to intimidate him, but tells the police nothing of his suspicions. The police release him.

He returns to his apartment. A girl enters and shoots at him, just missing his head.

He disarms her, succeeds in calming her. She is Martha Steinwold, daughter of the slain jeweler, and she had assumed that Mark was the murderer, but he convinces her otherwise. A strong attraction develops between the two. Her father also had been blackmailed, she reveals.

An insurance company investigator, Hopkins, visits Mark, and upon leaving the building is shot dead on the sidewalk. This time Mark escapes being imprisoned as a material witness only because Father Rothman stands in well with the police.

Meanwhile Claribel Yates and her chorus-girl roommate, Gladys Schmidt, go on a party with a third girl, Emmy Emmett. One of the hosts is a Spanish looking fellow, "Obispo"—and the other, she is amazed to discover, is her former employer, the man with the disappearing ink —Jackson Johnson.

PART III

CHAPTER XI

Claribel Makes Good

THE Obispo man played on and on. The footman refilled the glasses. Mr. Jackson Johnson was whispering to Miss Emmet. Mr. Rankin was whispering to Gladys. It was evident that Mr. Johnson didn't know Claribel from Adam. Also, he acted as if he had too many drinks. Claribel thought the music was grand.

Fully an hour passed while Mr. Obispo played and the footman poured drinks and Mr. Jackson Johnson held Miss Emmet's hand and whispered in her ear. Finally with a terrific smash-

ing of piano chords, Mr. Obispo concluded.

He rose and came over and took one of Claribel's hands. "You are the only one who was listening," he said. "I thank you."

"What are you?" asked Claribel. "One of those concert pianists?" Mr. Jackson Johnson laughed discordantly. He stared at Claribel.

"Well I'll be hanged," he exclaimed. "Aren't you the girl I fired yesterday or the day before? I didn't recognize you but I recognized your dumb way of asking questions."

Claribel gazed at him defiantly. "Yes," she replied. "Does it matter?"

Johnson chuckled. "Come to think of it, it's of no consequence at all. "Kid, I didn't realize you were so good-looking. If I had, I might have made allowances."

Claribel lifted her chin. "I have a good job now at more money than you paid me."

Mr. Jackson Johnson grinned in his fiendish fashion. "It won't last long. But you're almost decorative. Isn't she, Luis?"

Mr. Obispo gazed at Claribel. "I find her very charming," he declared.

"Where are you working, Claribel?" demanded the manager of the World Renowned Newspaper Syndicate.

"For a lawyer," said Claribel.

"Mr. Obispo," asked Emmy Emmet, who objected to another girl getting so much attention, "can't you play something we can dance to?"

He frowned at her. "I can," he replied, "but I won't." He snapped his fingers to his butler. "Pick up a dance band on the radio for this little Philistine."

Emmy rolled her eyes at Mr. Johnson. "He's calling me names," she complained. "What's a Philistine?"

"There's one fighting at Madison Square Garden tonight," Gladys informed her. The three men shouted with laughter.

"A Philistine," said Jackson Johnson gravely," is a girl who doesn't like classic music. I'll dance with you, my dear."

"I think that man you worked for is kind of nice," Gladys whispered to Claribel.

"I think he's just diabolical," said Claribel with conviction.

Mr. Rankin took Claribel out on the floor. She danced excellently despite lack of opportunities.

"Say," observed Mr. Rankin, "I could put you in my show. You have the looks and you could be a swell dancer if you had training."

"I got a job," stated Claribel. "But much obliged."

The butler touched Mr. Obispo, who was about to dance with Gladys. Obispo excused himself and left the room. A few minutes later the butler spoke to Johnson, who took Emmy back to her seat and followed his friend. The guests, left alone, clustered together and sipped wine contentedly enough.

HALF an hour elapsed before the "diabolical" Mr. Johnson and Mr. Obispo rejoined their guests, who had no trouble killing time.

Obispo was again the jovial host. "More?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Claribel eagerly.

"No," exclaimed the other three in unison. "We'd rather dance."

"Then let the dance go on," Obispo said good-naturedly. "Oh, Apperson. More wine. First, pick up dance music. Miss Yates, may I have the pleasure? Johnson danced with Emmy and the theatrical man took Gladys.

"You feel music, child," the Spaniard told Claribel. "It affects you pleasurably. When I played I watched your charming little face and it inspired me."

"I'll tell you something, Mr. Obispo," she said sagely. "I bet you could be one of those concert pianists if you wanted to. They make lots of money."

"I am a rich man, my dear, and a very busy man. The piano is my relaxation. You must come again and hear me play—alone. These others are barbarians."

"Yes," said Claribel dubiously. "I'm afraid I couldn't come to see you alone, Mr. Obispo."

"You mustn't be afraid of me. Tell you what. I'll have a nice old lady as a chaperon. How much money do you earn per week?"

"Twenty bucks. Mr. Johnson only paid me fifteen."

"You must have a hard time getting along," he said sympathetically.

She nodded. "It would be better if Gladys worked more," she admitted. "She's a chorus girl in shows and night clubs but mostly she's out of work. We live together and share expenses."

"Well, well, if it will help you I'll see that Gladys gets permanent employment. A word from me to one of a dozen night club proprietors and the kid would be set."

Claribel gazed up at him in awe. "You must have a drag. Would you do that for her?"

"For you," declared Mr. Obispo. "If you'll come and hear me play. I'll have a most respectable lady here."

Claribel gazed at him searchingly. He was an old man, she thought, and a person who played the piano so beautifully must be a nice man. His dark eyes had a kindly light in them.

"Could we go to some swank place for dinner, first?" she asked eagerly. "I've never been to a really tony joint."

"You and I will dine at the Colony. You think of what you'd like to eat and I'll have it cooked specially. Afterwards we'll call on this lady and come on here for a musical evening."

Claribel swallowed her inhibitions. "I guess that would be all right," she said.

He patted her prettily rounded shoulder. "Consider Gladys working steadily and paying her share of the rent," he advised. "Now I'm going to send you young folks home. I've some business matters to take up. Are we going to be friends?"

"You bet," she said enthusiastically. "I think you're swell."

He made a sign to the butler, who turned off the radio. The couples stopped dancing.

"We'll all have a real party soon," he said graciously. "I'm sorry this one has to break up, now. Will you ladies all give me your addresses and telephone numbers?"

They hastened to comply. He left the room, returned almost immediately and handed each of the girls an envelope. "To be opened only after you've left the building," he said gaily.

GOING down in the elevator Gladys opened her envelope. "A twenty dollar bill, a double sawbuck," she whispered to Claribel. "The guy's a Prince!"

"He ought to give us plenty," said the ungrateful Emmy," after making us listen to him smash a piano for hours."

"Well," said Mr. Rankin, the dance director, when they were on the sidewalk, "I took you girls up there. You got sixty bucks between you and I didn't get a darn cent. How about you

three taking me to the El Morocco, eh?"

"How about that job you was talking to me about?" asked Gladys pertinently.

"I'll let you know tomorrow."

Gladys eyed him shrewdly. "After I get the job, maybe I'll pay your check, mister, but not before. Come on, Claribel. We'll go home."

She signaled to a taxi.

"The job is off," Rankin said vindictively.

Gladys, temporarily affluent, laughed contemptuously. "It was never on," she retorted. "Coming, Emmy?"

"No-o," said Emmy. "I'll stay with Mr. Rankin."

Gladys slammed the taxi door and settled back beside Claribel on the cushions. "The darned gigolo," she muttered. "Well, anyway we can pay the rent, kid."

"Listen," said Claribel excitedly. "That Mr. Obispo is swell. He has a big drag around town, he told me, and he's landing you a steady job in a night club somewhere. He promised me."

"I've heard them promises. What did you promise him?"

"I—I said I'd hear him play some night again," confessed Claribel.

Gladys snorted. "New approach," she sneered.

"You got him wrong. He's nice. He likes people that appreciate music."

Gladys sniffed. "Call that racket he made music?"

"And he's going to have a chaperon for me," Claribel informed her. "But I won't go unless he lands you the job."

Miss Schmidt suddenly embraced her friend. "You're a sweet kid," she declared, "but unsophisticated. I'm hard. kid, and you ain't. So I'm not taking any jobs that get you into trouble."

"I'm not a bit afraid of Mr. Obispo," Claribel said confidently. "I kind of think I could wind him round my little finger."

"Famous last words," said Gladys scornfully. "Well, we won't ever hear from him, so why bother 'bout him. Guys like that go for new faces. I bet Rankin got a double sawbuck for dragging us up there. And it wasn't hard to take. Good wine and no brawling. I never even got kissed."

But Mr. Obispo was heard from. About noon next day Gladys was awakened from slumber by the telephone.

"This is John Dreedy, producer at the Shadow Club," he said. "You Miss Schmidt?"

"Yes, Mr. Dreedy," she cried excitedly. John Dreedy was producer of the most sumptuous floor show in town. The girls in that show were class and met the loveliest gentlemen.

"You've been highly recommended," he told her. "Hustle up here and let's see if you qualify for my chorus."

Gladys broke all records getting dressed, out and up to the Shadow Club. The try-out was perfunctory. "Report here to Bowers, the dance director, at four for rehearsal," he said. "And fittings for costumes. You'll go into the show Monday. Forty a week. That's all, Miss Schmidt."

CHAPTER XII

Sanctuary

MARK MASTERSON woke up up about eight-thirty. He was lying on a hard bed in a very plain room. On the wall were two holy pictures, poor copies of famous religious paintings. There was no carpet on the

floor. There was no bathroom. For a moment he did not realize where he was—then he remembered. Father Rothman had insisted upon taking him to the only home he had, Saint Hannah's Rectory.

Bill had first endeavored to persuade him to leave town. When Mark refused, Bill practically had dragged him to the Rectory. The priest had been convinced that Mark's life or liberty was in danger.

"Remember that warning about your heir," he said. "You inherit your Uncle's estate—somebody inherits your estate—somebody who may be more pliable than you are. The only chance to unmask these conspirators is to get a line on them. At present we sort of surmise that this Jackson Johnson is in the gang; he has disappeared. If you are wiped out, where are we? What I know, aside from what you've told me, is under the seal of the confessional. You don't want to sleep in this ill-fated apartment. What's the harm in being my guest tonight?"

"Well," said Mark. "If you put it that way."

In fifteen minutes the pair had left the Prescott Apartments and were on their way uptown. They departed so quickly that they evaded persons who had other ideas about where Mark Masterson should spend the night.

Mark rose and washed, using a pitcher of cold water and basin. When he had finished, Father Rothman entered in cassock and cap. He was in good spirits. "I've been up since six," he said. "Just celebrated seven o'clock mass. I waited breakfast for you. We'll be alone. The other fathers have had theirs and have gone about their various jobs. What are your plans, Mark?"

"I'll go to my office as usual."

"I've been thinking about you, my boy." The priest seated himself upon the recently vacated bed, which groaned under his weight. "From what Hopkins told you, he'd built up a theory that he didn't believe in himself until you confirmed it. So whatever he had to go on is lost. You're in a bad spot. Your conscience, however, is clean. You have no moral responsibility for your Uncle's death. You have no intention of paying blood money to murderers. You're young, you're going to be very rich, life is sweet. They put a man in your bed, probably chloroformed you while you slept, and cut his throat. They murdered Hopkins after he left you yesterday lest you might have confided in him. They're closing around you. I guarantee to get you safely to a landing field. There are boys I can call on. Go to Los Angeles. Take a ship from there to China. Your estate automatically will be credited to you. In six months, this murder ring may be broken and you safely can come back. How about it?"

The suggestion had a certain charm for Mark. After all he didn't want to die. He met the blue eyes of the priest—they were enigmatic. No telling what thoughts were behind them.

"Meanwhile, other people may be murdered for their insurance, their heirs will be terrorized into paying the murderers," Mark said slowly. "I told you last night, Bill, that I was going to stick."

The padre smiled. "I used to wonder why I liked you," he remarked. "You're not my kind. You're a pampered pup; you were a wastrel, in a small way; you haven't got a drop of Irish blood in your blooming veins, but at the gym I sort of cottoned to you. I had to give you sensible advice, but God bless you for not taking it, Mark. When a job like this comes up, I wish almost that

I wasn't a man of peace. I'm nailed to the altar here, you might say. I'd like to use guns, fists and feet on these filthy ghouls.

"After breakfast I'm going down to see the Commissioner of Police. He's a man that knows me and likes me. From now on you're going to be watched very carefully—assistance will be at hand if you need it. You'll find a clerk in your office this morning—a very fine lad that used to be a rum-runner but saw the light. A laddybuck with two big fists and a gun on his hip. Better engage an extra office; you and he and the little girl will be crowded in that cubby hole of yours. This clerk will sleep at your apartment with you; in fact you'll be like Siamese twins. His name is Mickey Mulligan. You'll pay him forty dollars a week."

"And what am I supposed to do?" demanded Mark.

"You're not to do anything," said Rothman sternly. "If you'd consulted me you'd never have gone to that newspaper syndicate, and maybe this Steinwold and the insurance man Hopkins wouldn't be corpses now. Though, perhaps, they would have murdered them both anyway. Let 'em come to you—come into the open and give us a look at them."

There was a knock on the door. It was the servant, an elderly, very homely woman.

"Father," she said, "Mrs. Hogan's daughter telephones she thinks her mother is dying—she wants you to come right over." The servant turned to leave.

A change came over the countenance of the old football guard. It had been belligerent; now there was a spiritual quality. He crossed himself.

"I'll go at once," he said.

CLARIBEL YATES had plenty of faults but tardiness was not among them. At one minute of nine she unlocked the door of Mark Masterson's office and entered. A small typewriter desk had been placed in the little room for the office girl, and after hanging up her hat and coat, she seated herself complacently. She took the cover off her typewriter and began to practice typing. When she had said she could run a typewriter, she had exaggerated slightly — about every fourth letter she struck was wrong.

She was interrupted after five minutes by the entrance of a young man.

"Hello, sweetheart," he said impudently. Claribel bristled. However, this was a good looking youth in his twenties. He had very light hair and very blue eyes. His nose was snub and his grin was wide and rather engaging.

"Fresh, ain't you?" commented Claribel with not so much indignation. "I am Mr. Masterson's secretary. Kindly state who you are and what business you got to transact." She was being very dignified.

"Name of Mickey Mulligan," the fellow replied. He shied his hat at the hatrack in the corner and it landed safely upon a hook. "How's that?" he inquired proudly.

"Just lucky," answered Claribel, suppressing a smile with difficulty. She liked big young men and this one was very big and strong looking. "And we don't handle divorce cases, if that's why you came in."

This was very guileful of Claribel, for she would find out right away if he was married.

"You and me are going to see a lot of each other," the youth told her as he seated himself on top of Mr. Masterson's desk. "I work here. I'm the new law clerk. Tag that, sister."

This statement if true was very bad news; Claribel no longer would be tête-a-tête with Mr. Masterson, And the young man, while undoubtedly fresh, did not look like a liar.

"Huh!" she retorted. "I'll believe that when Mr. Masterson tells me. And you certainly don't look competent to me."

"I'll be your boss, when Mr. Masterson isn't around," he said with a chuckle. "I'm a boss that likes to kiss the good-looking help."

Claribel sighed. "Well, this was a nice job. I'll hate to have to quit it."

"Oh, you'll get so you'll like being kissed by me, baby."

"Some men are so conceited it's awful disgusting," she said acidly. "And I don't think you're a law clerk. You look like a piano mover to me, Mr. Mulligan."

The opening of the door and the entrance of Mr. Masterson prevented further persiflage. Mulligan rose from the desk and grinned at the young lawyer.

"You heard about me from the Father, didn't you, sir?" he asked in a very respectful manner.

"You're Mulligan." Mark offered him his hand and sized him up with approval. Claribel's heart sank. Then it was all true.

"This is Miss Yates, my assistant," said Mark with twinkling eyes. "As you two are to be associated, you'd better be acquained."

Mulligan extended his right and with first and second fingers crossed.

"Ah, her and me are like that, already," he boasted.

"Mr. Masterson," said Claribel with heat, "I might as well tell you that this is a very fresh guy."

Mark grinned. "Don't you stand for any nonsense from him, Claribel," he advised. "Now please go down and see the superintendent and ask him if he'll rent me the next office, which is vacant, and send up and open the connecting door at once. You and Mr. Mulligan will have this office and I'll move in there. If Mr. Mulligan makes objectionable advances, you call up Father Rothman. She and the padre are great friends, Mulligan, by the way. Scamper, Claribel."

CLARIBEL obediently departed. Mark sat down at his desk, put his feet on the shelf and sized up his bodyguard.

"This was Bill's idea," he said. "Be as unobtrusive a possible, Mulligan. I suppose you're armed."

Mickey tapped his left breast. "Old Faithful is right here. I got orders to tail you everywhere and sleep at your apartment nights. Somebody wants to put the finger on you, I understand."

Mark became serious. "You read the papers this morning."

"Yeh. They put this dead jeweler in your bed. They croaked an insurance guy after he called on you yesterday afternoon. Seems like you're 'hot' Mr. Masterson."

"People whom I unfortunately don't know, dislike me," admitted Mark. "Blackmail is being attempted. We'll move my desk into the other room as soon as they open up. I'll get another small desk for you. Later I'll have my bookcases moved in there. Miss Yates is a sweet, simple little kid, Mulligan. Be careful not to annoy her."

Mickey laughed complacently. "She's crazy 'bout me already, sir. No dames ever complain 'bout me annoying them. I'm the one that gets bothered by the femmes."

"I see that you have a wholesome respect for yourself," Mark said dryly.

"Take a chair, now. I've got to go through my mail."

Mark's mail had grown tremendously. Business concerns take a great interest in persons reported to have inherited large fortunes. Real estate companies wished to sell him homes, brokers pleaded for a chance to handle his Wall Street affairs, worthy charities were already rushing requests, but what amused him most was that nearly all his creditors—things had happened so fast in the last few days he had not had time to pay his bills—wrote reassuringly. They were no longer in great need of payment; on the contrary they hoped he would disregard his present obligations and hasten to give them more patronage.

In ten minutes, the office building superintendent had arrived with assistants. The next office was being cleaned, the door connecting the two was swung open and a man was lettering Masterson's name in gold on the hall door. Things happen fast when a man is in funds.

In half an hour Mark had his private office and had moved in, and Claribel and the alleged law clerk were alone in the old quarters. Claribel pointedly ignored Mr. Mulligan and continued to practice typing, but she eyed him covertly. He was reading the morning papers, eyeing her stealthily the while. Conversation seemed at a standstill.

"I don't see," she said, after a while, "why he needs a law clerk. I been here several days and we don't seem to be doing any business at all."

"The way to get business," said Mulligan, "is to expand, put up a front."

"Yeah. It's lucky Mr. Masterson has lots of money."

"I would take you to lunch, Claribel," he said earnestly, "only I got to go with him."

"And if you didn't, you wouldn't take me to lunch."

She answered the phone. She looked startled, then excited.

"Oh, Mr. Obispo," she exclaimed. "Gosh, I didn't expect to hear from you again. Well, I don't think tonight. No, I—er—got an engagement."

Mulligan dropped his newspaper. He was staring at the girl as if stupified.

"No, Mr. Obispo," said Claribel. "Oh, you have. You did. I'm so glad for Gladys but maybe they won't give her the job. Maybe she ain't beautiful enough for a swell place like that. Oh, they have to give her the job. Gosh, that's swell of you, Mr. Obispo. Well, in that case, sure, I'll have dinner with you tonight—at the Colony? Oh, goody! At seven-thirty. Sure, I'll be there. And I'll love to hear you play the piano again. I'll be thrilled, honest, Mr. Obispo."

She hung up. Her eyes were shining—her cheeks were flushed.

"This guy's first name Luis?" drawled Mickey Mulligan.

WHEN a very rich gentleman takes the trouble to call a young lady at her office and invites her to a very swank restaurant for dinner, and when the gentleman has demonstrated how much esteem he has for her by arranging to plant her girl friend in a floor show in the best spot in town, she can't be blamed for being a bit set-up. So Claribel gazed haughtily at this fresh Irishman who probably didn't earn more than twenty-five dollars a week as a law clerk and who needed taking down anyway. And she was the girl to do it.

"It's a pity a lady can't have privacy when she's talking to a friend on the phone," she said bitingly, "If you had any sense of the thing to do, you would

have gone out into the hall when you realized it was a private conversation."

"Was that Luis Obispo?" he demanded sternly.

Claribel tossed her head. "That's my affair," she said stiffly.

"Okay, sister," he retorted. He rose, opened the connecting door and went into the private office, shutting the door behind him.

"Well?" asked Mark, putting down an invitation to contribute anything from a thousand to fifty thousand dollars to a new welfare association.

"Ever hear of a guy named Obispo?" Mulligan demanded.

"Obispo? There's a town named San Luis Obispo in California. No, I never heard of a man by that name."

"Luis Obispo is this mug's name," said Mickey Mulligan. "Big shot in this village. Got his finger in a lot of pies. This the egg you're having trouble with?"

Mark shook his head. "Never heard of him, I told you."

Mickey jerked his thumb toward the connecting door. "What do you know about that doll out there?"

"Why, not much. Obviously she's a nice little kid."

Mulligan nodded. "That's what I thought, but she ain't so dumb. Luis Obispo just had her on the phone. Made a date with him for dinner tonight. I'm wondering if she's a stool for Luis. He don't ask cheap little office brats to dinner at the Colony—he gives them ten bucks and chases them along."

"Just what is his line, this Obispo?" asked Mark, a bit concerned.

"In back of a lot of things." Mickey chuckled. "When I was nineteen, I drove a hootch truck for him. Him and Harry Fay ran a string of night clubs. He's now supposed to be financing a lot of bootleg alcohol distilleries. Anybody he don't like in New York hasn't got much chance. All the boys jump when he whistles. Bad medicine for that dumb Dora out there."

"I can't say anything to her," said Mark slowly. "Out of office hours, she's her own boss. I've only employed her a few days."

"Get you. Any objection to me telling her a few things?"

"I sincerely hope she listens to you. What did Father Rothman tell you about my difficulties?"

"Nothing 'cept to stick closer than a brother and shoot off the cannon if it seemed necessary to keep you from getting rubbed out or snatched."

"I don't expect anything like that to happen. That's all, Mulligan."

CHAPTER XIII

Lunch at the Ritz

MICKEY returned to the outer office. He sat down and twiddled his thumbs and stared gloomily at Claribel. Miss Yates kept her eyes upon the keyboard of the typewriter and tapped the keys steadily, but, aware that he was staring at her, she struck more wrong letters than usual and the tips of her little ears got red.

"Say, baby," he said hesitating. The approach was bad.

"Miss Yates to you," she snapped.

"All right, Miss Yates. What I want to say is that I'm a wise guy. I been around. I seen a lot of clucks step out with the big shots and they all come to a bad end."

"Mr. Obispo is a gentleman, which is more than you are," cried Claribel angrily. "And I'm not a cluck, see."

Mulligan had no talent for diplomacy. "If you're not a cluck," he re-

torted, "you're absolutely the best imitation I ever lamped."

Claribel, with flaming eyes and bright red cheeks, rose hastily, rushed to the connecting door and marched up to Mr. Masterson's desk.

"Mr. Masterson," she exclaimed, "if there ain't some way to keep that big stevedore from insulting me, I got to chuck this job."

Mark inspected her sharply. Her bosom was heaving, her eyes were blazing and it looked as if she were on the verge of hysterics.

"Mulligan!" he shouted. "Come in here." Mickey slouched in looking much embarrassed.

"You park yourself in this office from now on," he instructed the bodyguard. "And do not talk to Miss Yates at all. Miss Yates has given me an ultimatum." He suppressed a smile. "I don't believe this office could function at all without Miss Yates, so we mustn't lose her. You won't be bothered any more, Claribel."

Claribel's tears were now streaming down her cheeks. "You—you're swell, Mr. Masterson," she exclaimed. She turned. Mickey's face was the color of a ripe tomato. She lifted her chin—she threw back her shoulders, she gave him a poisonous look, marched past him and closed the door behind her.

"What happened?" asked Mark sternly.

Mickey scratched his head. "I was just trying to wise her up about this yegg she's going out with and she bit my head off. The heck with her."

"You're supposed to be a help around here, not a nuisance. Now sit down. Read a paper or something. In an hour we'll go to lunch."

At twelve-thirty Mark had put on his coat and hat, told Claribel that she could go to lunch herself at one, and left his offices. Mulligan strode along beside him. "Where we going to eat?" asked Mickey cheerfully.

Mark frowned. "Look here, Mickey," he said. "You're sort of a nuisance. The fact is I'm going to lunch with a girl today, if she'll agree. I can't have you on my heels every minute."

"If this is a good-looking Jane I don't mind us having lunch with her," Mulligan said blandly.

"You're not invited."

"Well I'll lunch in the same joint. How's that?"

"I'm not going to enjoy talking with a girl with you watching us, you big ape," Mark said testily.

"My orders are to stick close. If somebody's going to knock you off they might grab a chance when I wasn't with you."

"If this girl goes to lunch with me, you'll stay outside," asserted Mark. "Or I'll have the padre call you off this job."

"Okay," agreed Mickey. "I'll stay outside. It may be your funeral."

"I'm going into a store. She owns it. You'll stay outside the store, too."

Mickey shrugged. "All right to look through the window?"

"Confound you, I suppose so."

THEY took a taxi to the corner of Madison Avenue and 57th Street. They walked down a few doors and saw a very small show-window upon which was the name Julius Steinwold. It contained a rather scanty display of valuables, trinkets and knicknacks.

"If she comes out with me, you keep your distance. Do you think I want her to suspect I have a bodyguard?" But it did not look too prosperous.

"She might kind of like my looks," said Mickey complacently.

Mark had to laugh. "Claribel didn't exactly fall for you."

Mickey grew red. "She will, though. But I'll fade back boss. I ain't got handcuffs on you."

Mark pushed open the door. There was an anaemic, bald-headed little man behind the counter. At the back Mark saw Martha Steinwold at a small desk, her head bent over accounts.

"Can I serve you, sir?" asked the clerk.

"I'd like to see Miss Steinwold," Mark said loud enough for her to hear. She looked up. She smiled—a lovely smile, he thought. She rose and came toward him. She was in black—she was very pale but beautiful as a lily.

"This is kind of you," she said in a low, embarrassed tone. He became embarrassed. He had forgotten the grim circumstances of their first meeting. Maybe he shouldn't have intruded; he was taking advantage of the fact that she must be agreeable to him because he hadn't turned her over to the police. Maybe he was intruding on her grief.

"If—if you don't feel too bad, if you could manage it," he stammered, "I'd like to take you to lunch. Could you—er—would you—"

Her great eyes were fixed on his. "You really want us to be friends," she said, very low. "Yesterday, you did say so, but when you had time to think, I was afraid—I thought—"

"Put on your hat," he commanded gaily. He hadn't been mistaken; she had liked him yesterday when she left his apartment.

"Alphonse," she called to the clerk, "I'm going to lunch with this gentleman. I won't be more than an hour."

"Very good, Miss Steinwold," he replied, bowing to Mark.

As they stepped out of the store they almost collided with Mickey Mulligan. Mickey stared incredulously at the young woman, his eyes widened—he was almost bowled over by the astounding beauty of the girl. However he managed to mumble an apology and stepped back.

Mark's desire was to lose him; he didn't want that lout staring at him from the vicinity of where they would be seated; so he called a cab. As he stepped in after handing the girl inside, he scowled ferociously at the bodyguard. Mickey winked at him and nodded in approbation of his taste.

"The Ritz," Mark told the chauffeur. He glanced through the back window of the taxi and saw Mulligan getting into another cab. Confound the fellow, he was determined not to be lost.

They were given a rail table in the main dining room. Glancing outside, Mark saw Mickey Mulligan seating himself in a chair in the Japanese Garden in a position so that Mark's table was fully visible. Anyway he was quite a distance away—a comforting thought.

Martha and himself seemed to be immediately *en rapporte*. To Mark it seemed as if they had always been intimate—that they had been at table together before.

Their eyes smiled at each other while they were verbally still upon formal terms. She told him of police questioning to which she had had to submit.

"They asked curious questions. They wanted to know what Father had done with the large sum in cash he'd drawn from the bank. What could that have to to with his —his murder?" she asked.

MARK found himself telling her all that was on his mind, things that nobody knew except Bill Rothman, things that it was indiscreet of him to tell—which might cost him his fortune

if they were repeated and misinterpreted.

She listened, breathless. "Then you believe that there are horrible creatures who kill insured people after getting the beneficiaries innocently to sign those harmless-sounding agreements," she exclaimed. "And then they force the beneficiaries to turn the insurance money over to them—they kill them if they refuse."

"I'm certain of it. It's what they're trying to do to me."

"And what they did to my father," she murmured. "Mr. Masterson, please, please, guard yourself."

"I'll do my best." He was thrilled that this lovely girl was apprehensive on his behalf.

"They had doomed your father to death," he said gravely. "Either he had not paid them, or, after paying them, they demanded the full amount of the policy—perhaps he had placed his money where they couldn't reach it and defied them. In which case you may recover it. And wanting to give me an object lesson, they placed him in my bed. It's awful to talk to you about it."

He patted her hand.

"I need to know," she said through clenched teeth. "I honor you for fighting them. I will fight with you, if you'll let me."

"At present," he told her, "I'm fighting empty air. I'm hoping it won't be long, now, before they show themselves." He had no premonition, as he spoke, of how very soon it would be. "Father Bill says I am undoubtedly their prize package, and they'll go to great lengths to collect from me. And that's how we'll capture them."

"He must be very wonderful, that clergyman."

"He is a very grand guy," said Mark enthusiastically. "I was inspired when I decided to take him into my confidence."

"I'm afraid I must go back to the store. We've been here—" she glanced at her watch— "an hour and a half. If we can't find Father's assets we must abandon the store. It's an expensive site and our stock is very low."

"I'm going to take care of that. I feel in a way responsible for your father's death."

She shook her head but smiled gratefully. "I wouldn't permit that under any circumstances. I don't hold you responsible—you know that."

"Well," said Mark, "we'll discuss that subject another time. If you must go—"

She was rising. They walked past Mickey, who was smoking a cigar and who rolled his eyes at Mark. After they had passed he followed, trailed them in a second cab back to the store and was waiting on the sidewalk when Mark came out. Mark, with the exuberance of youth, had pleaded for a dinner engagement. But Martha had duties at the apartment which she had shared with her father. Besides, being a bright girl, she would not permit a young man to rush her like that.

"Now I see why you don't bother about that cute little monkey in your office," remarked Mulligan with offensive familiarity.

"Listen, Mickey," said Mark sternly; "I'm making a rule for bodyguards. They should be seen and not heard."

During the afternoon Mickey obeyed the rule. He was reading a volume of Blackstone from Mark's office library. Weirdly enough, the young man who had announced himself to Claribel as a law student was actually studying law in his spare time. When Mark called Claribel in and slowly dictated two or three letters which she took down in

longhand, he kept his eyes on the girl. Claribel affected not to be aware of his scrutiny.

Mark's letters were not important—replies to such of his creditors as he considered entitled to replies. He told them checks would go out within a few days.

Mulligan broke the silence at five when Mark was preparing to leave. "How about you and me having dinner at this Colony tonight?" he inquired.

"Why? Want to embarrass Miss Yates and her friend?"

"I want you to lamp that bloke. See for yourself if that kid should be allowed to step out with him."

"But we're not her relatives or guardians, Mickey."

"Everybody is supposed to take care of dumb animals," retorted the bodyguard.

Mark laughed. "Perhaps you're right. We must dine somewhere, and while that's expensive, I can stand the expense."

"Lissen, feller," said Mickey earnestly. "I'm beginning to like you."

The dinner at the Colony, however, was doomed not to be kept by Mark Masterson.

Accompanied by Mickey, the young lawyer returned to his apartment. Leaving Mickey in the living room, he went into his chamber. Later, he remembered feeling faint, a sensation of suffocation and then oblivion.

CHAPTER XIV

Inside a Coffin

MARK MASTERSON woke up. For a few seconds he thought he had become blind; then he realized that he was in total darkness. He had a frightful headache. He tried to put his right hand to his head but could lift it only a few inches. His fingers seemed to come into contact with a ceiling. He tried to rise; his forehead struck sharply against a flat surface.

He fell back, bewildered. He lifted his feet—the toes of the shoes thumped against the same flat surface only a few inches above them.

He turned his head; his cheek brushed against satin. He knew, now, he was in a box. He slipped his hand down against his side, fingered the cushion on which he was stretched. It was satin. This wasn't a box—it was a coffin.

It is given to few men to experience mortal terror. Mortal terror doesn't come in battle, in a burning house, in falling overboard from a ship in mid-ocean—the most poignant fear that some human beings can know is to discover that they have been buried alive.

Mark lay there so horrified that he almost lost consciousness. That phase was succeeded by a frenzy for movement. He placed his fists against the cover of the box. There was a satin lining on it too. It *was* a coffin in which he lay. He pushed with all his strength. The coffin lid was nailed down; he couldn't move it.

Was he in a grave with six feet of earth on top of the lid? Or was he in a room with candles on each side of the coffin? How long had he been here? How soon before he would be asphyxiated?

He tried to pull himself together. This was a dream—it must be. He hadn't been ill—he couldn't be dead. Merciful God, he thought; can dead people feel?—think?"

He kicked with both feet against the coffin lid. The padding permitted his shoes to make little sound. He desisted.

Mark Masterson was not a coward.

but no man is brave enough not to know terror when nailed in a coffin. His hands were clenched so tight that the nails cut into the flesh.

He suddenly remembered a wax works show in London, a dreadful exhibit representing a man who had been buried alive. The sculptor had achieved upon the face of the figure the most frightful expression imaginable. And Mark's own face probably looked like that. He drew in a deep breath. He must pull himself together. And he was breathing cool fresh air—he realized it now.

So he was in a coffin but air was being pumped into it. And that meant it was not intended for him to die. Mark almost sobbed as he understood that. It meant that they were going to lift the coffin lid, sooner or later.

The first vast wave of terror had passed. He was still badly frightened; his situation was appalling. Most likely, when they took him out of this box his hair would have turned white.

He breathed deeply and exhaled—a dozen times. He became calm.

How had this happened? He and Mickey Mulligan had ridden together from the office to the Prescott Apartments. He was going to pack up with Mickey's assistance and move at once to another hotel. He and Mickey had been in the apartment, and he didn't remember any more. Was Mickey in another coffin?

He knew, now, whom to thank for this. Another object lesson. He gritted his teeth. The Golconda Company were devils incarnate. Well, he knew that—they had blown up a plane with passengers and crew to kill Uncle Rodney. They would stop at nothing. They would kill him. Already they had tortured him. He had them to thank for the most ghastly experience of his life. And in some way, somehow, he would make them pay.

He was sufficiently recovered now to be able to smile sardonically at that determination. He couldn't make them pay unless they unscrewed this coffin lid and let him out.

AN hour must have passed—it seemed a century—and he heard thumping on the coffin lid, then the sound of screws turning. And a thread of light between lid and sides of the coffin. It grew wider. And then the upper half of the lid was thrown back suddenly. Mark closed his eyes tightly. The brilliancy of light after total darkness almost blinded him. He kept his eyes tightly closed for a second, then lifted his lids slightly. Meanwhile he was being lifted.

When he was able to open his eyes fully he found himself in what must have been an undertaker's storeroom. There were coffins on all sides.

Facing him, seated in a semi-circle, were four men in evening clothes who wore top hats and whose faces were entirely concealed by long black masks. Their costumes were completed by white gloves. Their effect would have been alarming except for what he had been through.

Mark actually smiled. The brutes didn't realize it but this was anti-climax. He wasn't afraid any more. He was no longer fastened in a coffin. Though they could, of course, shut him in again. But he didn't think they had any such intention.

"Mark Masterson," said a deep voice, "you find yourself before the Board of Directors of Golconda, Limited."

"A gang of bloody murderers," Mark said scornfully. "Why all this hocus pocus?"

He made to extricate himself from the coffin. The upper part of the cushion upon which he was lying had risen like a hospital bed, placing him in a semi-sitting position. The coffin lid continued to confine him from the waist down.

"Remain where you are," commanded the bass voice sternly, "or measures will be taken. The Chairman of the Board will now address you."

"You picked an appropriate place for your meeting, you pack of vampires," cried Mark with spirit. "I suggest you release me, because if you kill me friends of mine to whom I have confided the situation will make certain your eventual capture. My estate will be paid over only to persons not criminals. If you keep me a prisoner, the estate will be held by the executor until I am released. You've bit off more than you can chew."

Mark was growing more furious with each word he spoke.

"Silence!" thundered the bass voice. "Attend to the Chairman of the Board. The Chairman."

A tenor voice was lifted. Because of the masks and the immobility of the quartet of directors, it was impossible for Mark to tell which was speaking. Each man sat with his white-gloved hands folded upon his lap.

"Mr. Masterson," said this voice sharply, "when you abuse us, the pot is calling the kettle black. You owe us one quarter of your Uncle's estate. When you receive his insurance payment of half a million dollars in a short time you will draw out one hundred thousand in cash. You will not mark this cash. You will not tell anybody why you are drawing out the money. You will be notified at the time how to deliver it. This will be the first installment of your debt."

Mark, while the fellow spoke, had time to think. He remembered Father Rothman's admonition to play these rascals, not to defy them.

"What do you mean, 'the pot calling the kettle black?' " he asked more mildly. "I know nothing about my Uncle's death. You boast that you killed him. I don't even know positively his death was not an accident."

"You know that Julius Steinwold did not die accidentally. He made a bargain with this society. A life stood between him and a large sum of money. The life ended, Steinwold received his money and tried to evade payment. That is exactly what will happen to you, Mr. Masterson, unless you keep your agreement."

Mark stared at the four masked faces angrily. "I made no agreement to pay you to murder my Uncle," he declared.

"You were the instigator of that crime, Masterson. You knew positively that there was no possibility of obtaining a large fortune unless your Uncle should die before he learned that you were again in debt. We shall not have to eliminate you personally—witnesses will come forward to prove that you conspired with certain persons to destroy that transcontinental plane. The electric chair will take care of you."

"So that's how you work your racket," Mark said savagely. "Well, wind this up. I'm being given another object lesson. I don't need it. I know you're cold-blooded murderers. What are your plans for me?"

"You will agree to keep any suspicions you may have to yourself. You will go about your business quietly for ten days. You'll make no further effort to learn our identity. Hopkins came to his death because you talked to him

at length. Other persons in whom you confide will be quickly eliminated. Eyes will be on you always. Any overt act will quickly be thwarted."

"You go to all the trouble of getting me here to tell me this and then turn me loose?" Mark said scornfully.

"It has made an impression on you," replied the Chairman of the Board. The information has been given. That is all, Mr. Masterson. Now, gentlemen."

THE four men rose and approached the coffin. One stepped to the head of it, touched a spring, and Mark sank back into its depths. He was unable to suppress a cry of alarm. He heard a laugh from one of the four fiends. And then the coffin lid was lowered, the screws were replaced and again he was in darkness and silence.

He was not, however, as terrified as upon his awakening in the coffin. His associates in Golconda were in a spot themselves. They were not ready to kill him. His disappearance would alarm his executor; no money would be paid to Mark Masterson's account unless he personally was on hand to accept delivery. And Bill Rothman, a tower of strength, was already in touch with the police.

Presently the coffin was lifted and carried somewhere. It was set down. He judged it was being slid into a wooden box, and he began to be terrified for his air supply. However, he heard no sounds of nails being hammered.

Lifted again. And then he was conscious of the movement of a vehicle. He continued to get sufficient air for breathing purposes but under the circumstances he was naturally alarmed. Suppose these wretches had made a deal with this heir of his whom he didn't know, some simple soul who would be easier to manage than himself? But in that case they wouldn't have bothered to open this coffin and harangue its inmate.

He had almost an hour for his painful imaginings. The truck stopped a thousand times, it seemed—undoubtedly for traffic lights. It came to a final stop apparently and then the box was lifted out of the vehicle and lowered and set upon the ground, not too lightly.

He felt his coffin being removed from the outer casing. Then the lid was unscrewed, the upper half lifted and before he could raise his head a handkerchief soaked with a drug he recognized as chloroform was placed against his nose and mouth.

Some time later he came back to life. He was not in the coffin. He was lying on grass looking up at the stars. He sat up painfully and stared about stupidly. He sat upon a slight mound. There was a large white stone—a gravestone. There were gravestones all about him. He had been set free in a cemetery.

He looked about. The coffin had been carried off. Alone at night in a grave yard. Well, it wasn't the dead he had reason to fear but the living. This was an added bit of hocus pokus. They must think he was addle-pated if they figured he would be terrified of a cemetery after what he had been through.

He rose. The effects of the chloroform had not wholly worn off and he walked unsteadily. His head felt twice its natural size. He thrust his hand in his pocked and found his wallet—there had been fifty dollars in it, and he fingered several bills. It was a wonder they hadn't robbed him.

The cemetery was large and he wandered about for half an hour before he found an exit gate that was open. He

found himself in a residential district which suggested Brooklyn.

No cabs in sight. He walked a mile before he encountered one and by that time he was feeling much better. Also he yielded a certain admiration to the Golconda outfit.

One could understand now why persons who had been tricked into signing what seemed a silly agreement had paid their unjust debts to Golconda, Eldorado, or whatever glamorous name the criminals were using in their cases. Steinwold had been a tough customer, apparently. A hard-headed man who had worn out their patience. And as the sum of money involved wasn't especially large they had put an end to him.

They were very skillful workmen. Getting Steinwold into Mark's chamber had been an ingenious job. And tonight they had planted Mark in a coffin without him knowing how he got there. In his bedroom, changing his clothes at one minute, and the next thing he knew he was lying in a closed coffin. He shuddered. The first few minutes in that coffin—the period up to the moment when he realized that he was being fed air like a man in a diving suit—they were the most hideous minutes any human being could possibly experience. Buried alive. Ugh!

In an hour he arrived at the Prescott. The clerk looked surprised. "Didn't know you were out, Mr. Masterson," he remarked.

"Is Mr. Mulligan in my apartment?"

"Yes, sir. That is, he went out some hours ago, but came back a little while ago. Oh, here is a letter for you."

Mark tore open the envelope. It was a communication from the manager asking him to vacate his suite next day.

Mark smiled bitterly. Nothing would give him greater pleasure. Too many dreadful things had happened in that apartment. He would have moved tonight if his enemies had given him time.

CHAPTER XV

All Down in Black and White

MARK unlocked the door of his apartment and entered. The lights were on, and Mickey Mulligan, who had been walking up and down the floor of the living room, stopped short. A delighted grin was on his Celtic countenance.

"For the love of—— Say, Mr. Masterson, *am* I glad to see you!"

"How are you, Mickey?" Masterson asked pleasantly. "What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Looking for you—all over town," said Mickey glumly. "What happened here, Boss?"

"I'll be obliged if you'll tell me," said Mark sharply.

"Well, I dunno. I come in here and sat down when you went into your bedroom and I suddenly felt awful sleepy. The next thing I know I wake up and it's half past eight o'clock. Your room is dark. I go in and turn on the lights and you're gone. I think you've sneaked out on me probably to meet that dame you had lunch with. I'm wise you don't like me keeping tabs on your every minute. I called up Father Rothman about an hour ago. I figured I had to tell him I'd flopped on the job. Well, he went out on a sick call about seven o'clock and he hadn't come back."

Mark sat down. "You fell asleep as soon as you sat down. Had you felt sleepy?"

"Never more wide awake in my life."

"Well, I was in the bedroom. I'd started to change my clothes. I woke

up in a place where I'd been taken by some people who wanted to have a talk with me. I don't know how it was done but I think that this apartment was full of some kind of gas, Mickey. While you were unconscious I was taken out of the apartment. Rather interesting, isn't it?"

Mickey had turned white. "Gas," he muttered. "Just what are you up against, Mr. Masterson?"

"I'll have a chat with Father Bill tomorrow and we'll decide how far we can take you into our confidence. How did you feel when you woke up?"

"I was sick to my stomach and I had a big head."

"We both were gassed," declared Mark. "How much do you value your life, Mickey?"

The young Irishman stared at him, troubled. "I kind of like it but I'll take a chance."

"The situation is that certain people think I'm more valuable alive than dead—at present—but that doesn't apply to you. They will kill with no scruples. Want to resign?"

Mickey Mulligan shook his head. "I told the Father I'd take this job on. I'm not doing any resigning."

"Good man. I've reason to feel sure we'll have no trouble tonight. I'm sorry I have a double bed instead of twin beds, but suppose you phone down and ask them to send up bedding to make up a bed on the couch here in the living room."

"Okay, Boss." He gazed curiously at Mark. "Kind of a funny way to get you somewhere just to talk to people. Just what did happen to you, Chief?"

"I may tell you after I've talked to Bill Rothman. Good night, Mickey. Did you have dinner?"

Mickey nodded. "Ate in a lunchroom. I was plenty worried. Looked like I was a dud on the job I took on."

"And we didn't dine at the Colony. And we don't know how my office girl enjoyed her dinner with Mr. Obispo, the Big shot. Well, we may learn in the morning. I'm turning in. I've had a very fatiguing evening. Get yourself made comfortable, Mickey. Oh, by the way, we're moving tomorrow. The management doesn't care for my patronage. Too many things have happened in this apartment and they haven't even heard of what happened tonight."

IN bed in the dark, Mark was wide awake. His hair hadn't turned white yet but there was a possibility it might before morning. If he went to sleep, it was a certain thing he'd have a nightmare.

He threw off the covers, went to his writing desk, took pen and paper and began to write. He had decided to set down on paper all that had happened since he received the first communication from Golconda, Limited, right through tonight. In the morning he would take it to the bank and put it in a vault. In case of his death it would be found and give the authorities something on which to work.

He wrote steadily for an hour. This was the last line of the document.

"So you may assume that, even if my death appears to be the result of an accident. I have been slain for the same reason that Steinwold was slain, because I would not traffic with murderers."

Feeling much better, he placed his statement in an envelope, sealed the envelope and laid it upon his night table. He then extinguished the lights and went to bed. He slept soundly. No nightmares.

The sun was streaming through the

four windows of the chamber when he awoke. Mickey Mulligan stood in the open doorway grinning at him.

"Have a good night's rest?" he inquired of Mark.

"Very good, thanks. And you?"

"Swell. Shall we eat up here on down in the dining room?"

"Might as well have breakfast served up here. Get on the phone, Mickey, and make an appointment for me with Father Rothman."

"Sure."

Mickey vanished. Mark yawned, stretched, and swung his legs out of bed. His eyes fell upon his night table. The envelope was not there. He stared blankly.

Mickey came back. "Called up St. Hannah's," he announced. "Father Bill's morning to visit hospitals. I left word you'd like to talk to him."

"Thanks," Mark said absently. Maybe he hadn't left the envelope on the night table. Perhaps he had put it in the desk. Though he was sure he had not, he went carefully through the desk. There was no question whatever that his statement had been stolen while he slept.

"What do you want to eat?" demanded Mickey.

"Coffee and toast."

"Any objections to me having ham and eggs?" asked Mulligan anxiously.

"None at all. I don't happen to be hungry."

"Okay, boss."

Mark went into the bathroom and mechanically went through the business of bathing and shaving. Another object lesson.

By the time he had shaved and dressed the apartment bell rang and Mickey admitted two waiters, one bearing a tray of silver-covered dishes and the other carrying a table. The second waiter also brought a note for Mr. Masterson.

It was on the stationery of the president of the apartment company.

> The Prescott Apartments regrets suggestions from a manager who has been removed from office that Mr. Masterson should leave the hotel. The company values his patronage. If Mr. Masterson wishes to change his quarters, it will be a pleasure to the company to please him. We have apartments at every price and superior to what can be found elsewhere. Please phone the office and signify what is desired.
>
> *Aubrey Ponsonby, Manager*

Mark's eye was attracted by a list of names at the right side of the letterhead. It was a list of officers of the Consolidated Hotels and Apartment Houses, Incorporated. Heading the list was the name of the president. It was Luis Obispo.

"Mickey," Mark asked, "wasn't the name of the man who took my office girl to dinner Luis Obispo?"

"That's right," said Mickey. "I'm hungry as the deuce."

"You said he was a big shot. That means a criminal. But the name of the president of the corporation which owns this hotel is Luis Obispo."

"Yeh? Well, Luis has millions. I suppose he invests his money in joints like this. Why not? They make plenty of jack."

"I suppose so." Mark seated himself, buttered his toast and poured his coffee. He had little appetite.

"I'm leaving this place today," he decided. "I think I'll move to the Hotel Blitz."

Mickey grinned. "I was in the lobby once. Imagine me living in a joint like that."

"I'm glad *you're* satisfied," Mark said with a wry smile.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

"I'll take the dough," he said, and smiled

By Eric Howard

Author of "The Case of the Flying Junkmen," etc.

Anything for a Friend

She Was a Sensation As Hollywood's Newest Screen Menace—And Her Repertoire Included Everything From Jewel Robbery to Murder

NO shamus ever had a softer job than yours truly, William Xavier O'Brien—Bill X., for short. There I was, sitting with my feet on a near-mahogany desk in a private office on the nineteenth floor of the Great Western Insurance Company, in the heart of Frisco town. Most of the time all I had to do was look out over the bay and think about sailing away to the South Seas or somewhere.

Two ornamental babes, one blonde and one with midnight hair, came running in, one at a time, of course, whenever I pressed the button. We'd sit and chin, and I'd gaze into their eyes; and sometimes date them up for dinner, with the Great Western paying the check.

And I had to spoil it all. The big shot who owned ninety per cent of Great Western stock handed me the job on a silver platter after I dragged his erring daughter back from a near-honeymoon with a tramp. Of course I had to batter up the tramp a little, and when he was out I threw him on a

ship bound for far ports. I had plenty of boys on the staff to do the work, and did I learn how to pass the buck?

But spring fever gets a man. So one day, when a soft west wind was blowing, I buzzed the buzzer and the cute little blonde came in.

"Take a letter," I said. I knew all the words.

She sat down and crossed her legs, and it was all I could do to concentrate.

"Never mind correcting the grammar on this one, toots," I said. "It's to a dumb egg if ever there was one. But he's bright enough to hang on to a swell job. Mr. Joseph Burke, Imperial Pictures, Hollywood, California. Dear Joe—"

"Oh, I'd like to be in pictures," says my little helper.

"You and thirty million other dames. Keep your mind on your work."

"Yes, sir," she said meekly and twisted around so that her knee became the center of interest. Then she smiled at me, with her pencil above her notebook, just as if she didn't know she had knees.

"Maybe I can fix it up, at that, babe," I told her. "Joe is an old pal. He's head fixer for Imperial Pictures. And is that a job? I'll keep it in mind."

"Oh, Mr. O'Brien!" she gurgles.

I go on with the letter. I tell Joe what I'm doing and how come. I tell him nothing ever happens any more and I'm getting stale. I ask him does he remember this and that little fracas, where we stood up and socked or lay down and dodged machine gun slugs. I rave about the good old days, the way a guy will when spring is in the air.

"What an exciting life!" says the blonde.

"Yeah," I said, and began to tell her about some of our heroic exploits. A man just has to talk about himself when a girl like her will listen.

"I'd love to meet your friend, Joe Burke," she says.

"Do you no good," I growled. "All the dames in Hollywood are after him. You stick to Bill X. O'Brien, toots."

The letter went off, and a couple of days later Joe shot me a telegram:

TAKE LEAVE OF ABSENCE INSURANCE JOB STOP NEED YOU HERE QUICK STOP FLY DOWN STOP JOE

And—sap that I am—I did!

I guess I forgot all the times Joe almost got me killed. A man is never satisfied. If he's in the thick of battle, he craves peace and quiet. If he has a nice quiet job, with maybe two dolls to decorate the office, he wants war.

I STEPPED out of the cabin plane at Burbank and there was Joe, as big as life, in a two hundred dollar suit of scrambled clothes. The idea was not to let anything match anything else. His coat was one kind of plaid, his pants another; he had on a green shirt with a yellow tie. And blue shoes. And a tan hat with a purple feather in it. And me in my neat blue serge!

Joe grabbed me and hustled me over to a big car. It was almost as noisy as he was. He had a grinning little Japanese chauffeur.

"Home, Moto," he said.

And I had to hang on! That Jap broke every traffic law. But the cops knew the car and waved us on. A motorcycle cop tore out ahead of us when we hit the boulevard and escorted us all the way to Beverly Hills. Joe waved to him when he turned back.

"Do you own this town?" I asked.

"Right in my vest pocket, kid," he said. "The front man for Imperial Pic-

tures can have anything he wants in this burg. I can square anything—within reason, if I do it in a nice way. Even murder."

The way he said it gave me a shiver.

"Who killed who?" I asked. "And where do I come in?"

We were shooting into the subterranean garage under a big, swank apartment house. A guy in an admiral's uniform opened the elevator for us and we shot up to Joe's duplex apartment. It must have set him—or Imperial Pictures—back five hundred bucks a month. I was standing in the big living room, open-mouthed in the midst of such elegance, when Joe gave me a shove that sent me down. I slid across the polished floor and landed under the grand piano.

I had my face fixed for a yell of protest when I heard a shot.

I saw a flash upon the balcony. Some mug, hiding up there, had tried to get Joe. Then Joe was pounding up the stairs after him.

"Happy days are here again!" I yelled, and scrambled up the stairs, too.

Joe was wrestling with a locked door. The fellow who shot at him had run into this bedroom, locked the door, and was now on his way out, probably. Down the fire escape.

Joe brushed past me, and I twisted the knob. He ran down and got the telephone. I heard him yelling orders into it. When he hung up, I went down.

He grinned at me. "That calls for a drink, Bill X.," he said.

"A tall one," I agreed. "I haven't been shot at since the last time."

"Not you. Me. I moved you out of the way because the innocent bystander is always the guy that gets it."

"You didn't have to shove so hard."

He got out the bottles. The telephone rang.

"What?" he asked. "All right. Never mind."

He put the phone on its cradle. "Nobody saw him," he said. "They never do."

"Give me the scenario," I said.

"Ever hear of Honey-Child Marian Hope?" he asked.

"Say, do you think I'm dumb? Not only heard of her, but I've seen every picture she's been in and read all the fan stories about her and have three pictures of her in my room. Boy, I know my cinema. And little Marian—that honey-child is my idea of the female of the species."

He makes a face. "Just another sap," he says. "If you ever meet her you'll change your mind."

"Meet her? Any chance? I'd give a month's pay to meet her."

"Save your dough. It ain't worth it. You'll meet her, I hope."

LITTLE Marian is the new tops among screen sirens. She has everything. They started calling her Honey-Child, and it caught on. Now she's Honey-Child to all the world. I'm all for her. I wouldn't miss one of her pictures any more than I'd miss a meal.

"Honey-Child killed a guy and we're trying to cover up," said Joe. "But she crossed us and some of her lousy friends are trying to shake us down."

I almost spilled my drink.

"That little girl kill somebody? Why, you're crazy! And if she did, he needed killing."

"Sure he did. But we still have to cover up. Imperial has a couple of million tied up in her pictures. But she didn't kill him because he needed killing. She did it for fun."

I sat down.

He laughed at me. "Two weeks in Hollywood and you'll be a cynic. Here's

the dope, kid. I wasn't on the job when the big boss, Grossberg, picked her up and decided to make her a star. He fell hard. She looked all right. She had a mama and a papa and they looked respectable. She handed out a line about a convent education. Grossberg is smart, but he wouldn't know one kind of education from another. He signed her. No investigation. She clicked in her first picture. That was the director. He worked himself sick over her. Then Grossberg teamed her with Bob Dupont and she was a star. Everything was all right. She was a sweet little girl, easy to handle, very grateful to Grossberg, with a nice mama and papa. Yeah! Then the rumors started buzzing, and Grossberg began to worry."

"What kind of rumors?"

"The sweet kid's papa was a two-time loser. Mama knew all the tricks. And the Honey-Child had been a crook since she was ten years old."

"I don't believe it!"

"All right, stupid. Ever hear of Diamond Jack Lee? And Queenie Lee? Mama and papa! The dicks in fifteen cities knew the Honey-Child—not as Marian Hope, but as Jackie Lee. Nice, huh? Mama and papa weren't content with taking a cut of the kid's pay-check. They had to keep their hands in. They took the babes in Hollywood for many a ride. We settled the squawks."

Joe poured another drink.

"And then, into the life of this innocent young gal, came one Duke Crespi. She had married him once, but she forgot about it and mislaid him. He says she ratted on him and he had to take a rap. But since she's still his wife, he's willing to forgive and forget if she'll be nice and divvy the salary. Does she call on me and come clean? Does she ask me to fix it and get Crespi out of the picture? She does not! No, she calls me up and says, cool as you please, 'Hello, Joe, old pal. What you doing? I've been having a swell time. I just killed a so-and-so. You should have seen his face, Joe! Nobody in pictures could have put on an act like that. I've been wanting to kill him a long time, but I didn't know what fun it would be. Come on up, Joe, and move him away, will you?' Kidding like that, see?

"I said, 'Murder's no fun. Think up another gag.'

"And she came back, 'This is no gag, big boy. Come and see. I'm going to call Grossie now.'

"She hung up on me, and I said, 'Oh, nuts.' But when I got to thinking it over, I figured I'd better go up. I did. She let me in. Duke Crespi was sprawled on the rug in her living room.

" 'There's the corpus whatever you call it,' she laughed. 'And here's dear old Grossie.'

"The boss came in, groaned and started pounding his chest. The Honey-Child laughed at him. I had to calm him down and think fast. It had to be fixed. Quick. I called her director, had him get a company together, start shooting. I hustled her over to the studio, fixed her maid and a couple of others. Alibi stuff: she'd been on the lot, in her dressing-room, for hours, waiting to be called to the set. Then I fixed her butler. Mama and papa were at Palm Springs, probably lifting somebody's ice. The butler had been awakened by a noise. He grabbed a gun and went downstairs. He saw Crespi at the wall safe where Marian kept her jewelry. He called to him, ordered him to put up his hands. Crespi whirled and fired. The butler shot, too. Killed Crespi. We planted a gun in Crespi's hand, after shooting at the wall. Then the butler called us, Grossberg and me, not wishing to disturb the poor little

over-worked actress. And we came. All we had to do was to call the police, tell them the story, make it stick, and have 'em identify Crespi as an ex-con. Simple, huh? Yeah, and our little star's rep was still unsullied, even if she had killed her husband. Everything was jake, Bill X., but she had to cross us."

Joe Burke sighed.

"How?" I asked. It was hard for me to believe all this, after seeing that sweet babe in the pictures.

"A fake snatch, with her as the victim. Papa and mama in on it, but claim they aren't. They want to shake down Grossberg for a hundred grand. I say no; that's why the mug took a shot at me. I'm in the way."

"Is it your dough? Why not let 'em kick through?"

He twisted his face into a mean scowl. "I hate to let a bad dame and her playmates slip anything over. Grossberg's not much to look at, but he's a square mutt, in his way." Joe grinned and looked natural. "Besides, if I can save a hundred grand, I'll get a chunk of it. Always one eye on the main chance—that's me. How about you, kid? Shall I cut you in?"

"What can I do?"

He got up and felt my biceps. "You can sock," he said. "No holds barred. You haven't gone soft on that job, except in the head, maybe. Listen, fran, I want you to get to Diamond Jack Lee, dear papa. Not as my agent, not for Imperial Pictures. Independent, or maybe for your own outfit, Great Western Insurance. Jack has lifted ice from everybody, probably some you've insured. When you get to him, I want you to go to work—the old rough and ready, see? The old one-two. Don't let him know, till the time comes, what you want. Then—make him take you to the dame's hideout and bring her back—alive! To me! Do that, sweetheart, and you can have five grand."

He pushed the bottle toward me.

Five grand was a lot of dough. Joe needed help. I craved action. And maybe I'd meet the Honey-Child and get a chance to judge for myself.

"Joe," I said, "anything for a friend."

"And five grand," he said.

THAT'S why I didn't hang around Joe's duplex, drinking his liquor and leading a life of carefree luxury. I had to contact Diamond Jack Lee, on my own and in my own way. I had heard of the iceman, but never bumped into him. Queenie Lee, his dame, was also well-known. The bulls had put Jack away twice, for some careless work he did. Queenie had been questioned a few dozen times, but they never got anything on her. I learned a lot from an old flatfooted Sergeant down at Headquarters. His name was Kelly and you know the Kellys and the O'Briens have always been pals.

"You workin' for that picture outfit?" he wanted to know. From the way he said it, he didn't like them.

"No," I told him. "Great Western Insurance."

"All right, then. Them picture people, I got no use for them."

"How's that?" I asked.

He hit a cuspidor six feet away, dead center.

"We work our heads off on a case," he said, "an' clear it up so's it's as plain as my brogue. An' then what? They go over our heads with their filthy lucre an' the crooks get out of jail or the D. A. says there's no evidence. It's sick an' tired I am of the rotten graft— But you want to know about Jack an' Queenie. Nice folks, they are. Married respectable all these years. I

had Queenie in here for questionin', a few years back, an' she had her kid with her—the same one that's now the picture star—an' they both cried all over the place, till I felt like a cruel-hearted devil, indeed. We knew plenty, but provin' it was another thing. We let 'em go, an' I was glad of it. Their cryin' touched my heart, it did—the lyin', thievin', treacherous—"

"Where will I find Diamond Jack?" I asked.

"I've got a stoolie that'll know," said Kelly. "Call me up this afternoon an' I'll tell you. But surely Jack has been runnin' straight since the kid is in the big money. With all that dough in the fam'ly . . ."

"Yeah," I said. "This is an old job. Some time back he lifted some stuff that belongs to one of our clients. It's heirloom stuff, inherited from a noble family. Sentimental value, mostly. I figure maybe Jack hasn't sold it, and we'd like to get it back. We're ready to deal with him."

Which was hooey, but it made a nice story for Kelly—and it might be good for Diamond Jack, too.

KELLY got the word from the stoolie. Jack was staying at a dude ranch, fifty miles out of town, in the mountains. He was registered as Leigh Jackson and he was supposed to be a big New York jeweler on a vacation.

I rented a car and chugged out there. This place was in the mouth of a big canyon. A stream flowed through the grounds, right past the big stone and timber lodge. This was where the guests loafed and ate. All around it were log cabins, where they slept. They had a big stable, back up the canyon, and a corral, with a few cowboys who had come out to crash the pictures and hadn't made the grade handling the stock and the dudes.

I went into the lodge and asked about accommodations. I was still wearing the plain blue serge and I didn't look like a retired banker or movie star. The clerk is a young sprig with his nose in the air and not much chin. He wears a twenty-five dollar edition of the kind of scrambled clothes I've seen on Joe.

"I'm afraid we have nothing for you," he tenored, running his hand over his wave. "Our only vacancy is a de luxe cabin. A hundred and twenty-five dollars a week."

"So what?" I growled, and threw down two century notes—Imperial Pictures money—from a stuffed wallet.

He melted and went servile on me.

"I want rest and quiet for a day or so," I said. "When I've caught up on my sleep I'll ride and swim. Meanwhile, have my meals served in the cabin."

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir."

A boy took me to the cabin. I didn't do any sleeping. But I lay down on a couch and kept my eyes on the grounds. Sergeant Kelly had shown me an old rogues' gallery picture of Diamond Jack and Joe had given me a candid camera shot of him and Queenie at Palm Springs.

A tall man, with iron-gray hair, wearing sun glasses, and dressed in riding clothes, walked past the cabin. It was Diamond Jack all right. I watched him. He went to the lodge, picked up some mail, then walked across to another de luxe cabin. It was about fifty yards from mine.

"This is going to be the easiest five grand I ever made," I thought.

When the dinner gong sounded, Jack came out, all spruced up in other clothes, and strolled over to the dining-

room. A waiter came to my door and knocked. I told him to come in and he handed me the menu. I ordered dinner.

It was getting cool in the canyon and when the waiter brought my food, I asked him to light a fire in the fireplace. As he was bending over, I saw the butt of an automatic sticking out of his trouser pocket, under his short coat.

What kind of a dump was this? I wondered.

The waiter was a swarthy mug with a kind of mean look in his eye. There was a scar on the back of his neck. But he smiled and rubbed his hands and asked the usual waiter's questions. He gave me plenty to eat and good service.

When he was taking the tray back to the kitchen, Diamond Jack came out of the lodge. He said something to the waiter, who stopped and answered him, then went on. I thought he jerked his head toward my cabin. What they said might be what any guest would say to any waiter; then, again, it might be something else. The automatic in his pocket told me I'd better get to work right away.

Jack walked up and down, outside, smoking a pipe. He was a respectable looking mug, at that. You wouldn't believe he was an ex-con and iceman. After a while, he went back to his cabin and turned on the lights.

A flighty dame went and knocked on his door.

"Oh, Mr. Jackson!" she cackled. "Would you care to make a fourth at bridge?"

"Sorry, dear lady!" Jack called back. "Some other time. I'm dog-tired from my ride and must turn in."

He had a nice accent. The dame fluttered on. You could see Jack wouldn't have had any trouble lifting her baubles—and she probably wouldn't squawk, either.

WHEN most of the guests were in the lodge, probably playing bridge, I got up and went to call on Mr. Leigh Jackson. I knocked on his door. He came and said: "Yes? What is it?"

I said, under my breath, "I'm a dick, Jack. Great Western Insurance. Take it easy. No trouble. I just want to make a deal with you. There's dough in it—and no bulls."

He hesitated half a moment, then shrugged.

"Come in, shamus. Have a seat. By the way, how did you learn I was here?"

I grinned. "Now, now, you don't want to know all the trade secrets, do you?"

"Oke, brother. What's on your mind? What's the deal?"

He leaned back in a chair, his eyes half-closed. He was a handsome old boy, with a sort of devil-may-care look in his eye. I gave him the song and dance I had rehearsed for Kelly about the heirloom jewelry we wanted back for a rich old dame of noble family and how we were willing to pay off and let bygones be bygones.

"What makes you think I have the pieces you speak of?" he inquired.

"If you haven't," I said, "I'm wasting my time. But I figured there was nobody but you, west of Chi, anyway, who'd have brains enough to handle stuff like this. It would take brains to figure it wasn't worth much, split up, but that the old dame would want it back."

"How much is it worth to you?"

"I'll put the cards down, Jack. I can go as high as ten grand. No bulls, no questions. Just a fair trade."

I could see he was thinking it over, wondering how he could take ten grand away from me for some stuff that he had never stolen, that had never been stolen, in fact! He was a smart guy, and you can always take a smart guy by putting easy money in front of him. Besides, Jack had a sense of humor; it would tickle him to make a sap out of me.

"All right," he said. "It's a deal. You've got the money?"

"I can get it quick," I said. "You got the stuff?"

"I can get it quick," he echoed me.

"Tonight?" I asked. "I'd like to hop back to Frisco tomorrow."

"Tonight will do. Might as well fix it up." He looked at his watch. "It's eight. There's a roadhouse on the highway three miles east of the turn-off that comes here. I'll have to go to town."

"Me, too," I nodded.

"Suppose we meet at the roadhouse at twelve? We'll have a beer together and make the trade. Right?"

"Right," I said.

He got up and I moved to the door.

"I like to meet a boy who knows his way around," he said.

I WENT and got out my car and drove down toward the highway. But I headed off the ranch road into some trees and turned off my lights. After a while, Jack went by in a long-nosed roadster, a twelve-cylinder job. He wasn't driving. The waiter was at the wheel.

I thought about tailing him into the city. But I couldn't keep up with that roadster. I went on down to the highway and grabbed a phone in a booth at a filling station. I called Joe, got him at the studio after trying his apartment. I gave him the lay.

"Have one of your boys pick 'em up on the boulevard and tail 'em," I said. "See where they go and what they do. I think Jack will show on time. Then I'll work him over and make him talk. I'll probably bring the dames back by morning. Queenie must be with her chick."

"Bring 'em back alive," he said. "Once I get hold of the Honey-Child I'll keep her under lock and key until her contract runs out and Imperial cashes in on her pictures. Beat 'em to the punch, Socko."

That was that, and there was nothing for me to do but kill some time. I drove out and spotted the roadhouse, then cut back and went into a sandwich joint. I guzzled beer and chewed a sandwich—the O'Briens can always eat—and read the sport page in the evening paper. Then I turned to a chatter column. Down at the bottom I found this:

What's the story back of a famous new star dropping out of sight? She used to be seen everywhere, at all hours, but no more. Can it be romance? Or is there something wrong? Why the new gray hairs in her producer's head? A sad story, mates.

AT ELEVEN o'clock I tried to call Joe again. Couldn't find him. Well, what of it? All I wanted was to get a chance at Jack, alone, make him open up.

At a quarter to twelve I got in my car, rolled on to the roadhouse, went in. There was a big room, with a bar down one side, a dance floor surrounded by small tables, booths back of that. A stairway led up to private rooms. I looked around. Jack wasn't there. I hadn't seen his car outside.

A grimy waiter tried to guide me to a small table. I shoved him aside

and grabbed a booth, opposite the door.

"Waiting for a party," I said. "Beer and tongue on rye."

The beer was lousy, but I drank it. The clock said five of twelve.

Diamond Jack stepped in, saw me, and pointed upstairs. I nodded. I threw a dollar on the table and followed him. He had left the waiter-chauffeur outside, I guessed, and I was just as well satisfied.

At the end of a hall, upstairs, I saw another flight of stairs that led to the kitchen, at the rear of the joint. That's the way we'd go out. We'd get in my rented car and go places.

Jack was standing in the door of one of the rooms. I joined him and we sat down.

"You got the money?" he asked.

I gave him half a nod. "The heirlooms?"

He laughed and bobbed his head. "Sure," he said.

And reached into his pocket. I was over-confident. I didn't think an iceman would turn into a stick-up artist. His hand came out, not with a neat little packet, but with an automatic.

"I'll take the dough," he said, and smiled.

"Like hell you will!" I snapped. "Give me the stuff, let me look it over. Then—and not before—you get ten grand."

"Hard, huh?" he asked.

"Hard enough," I said.

But not hard enough to take what came. An arm around my neck, a thud on the head. The waiter had sneaked up on me.

The next thing I knew I was in the roadster, sitting between them, and Jack had a rod boring into my side. I felt for my own gun with my elbow. Gone, of course. I made a noise.

"We're taking you where we can look you over for the jack," said Jack. "If it takes a stomach pump, we'll use it. And if there isn't any jack, it's too bad."

I knew what he meant. If there wasn't any jack, if I'd been stringing him along, he'd know I was one of Joe's little pals. They wanted Joe out of the way, but they wouldn't mind removing me, too, just for luck.

I kept still.

We were purring along at seventy, which I didn't like. Too many curves. In the rear-view mirror I spotted a single headlight, behind us, coming as fast.

"Lose that damned motorcycle cop!" said Jack.

"Tryin' to," muttered the other mug.

But the cop stuck for quite a while. I was hoping we couldn't lose him. We hit eighty and he was still there. Then we swung into gravel, skidded, grazed a fence, and, with lights out, went south. The cop didn't follow.

We didn't go far. About a mile. Then we turned into a driveway, past a little house, and into a big barn.

"Out!" said Jack.

I climbed out, with my head aching, and marched ahead of him to the house. The shades were all down, but a little light flickered through.

A dame opened the door and stood in the light. She looked like a fifty-year old Marian Hope. Queenie.

"Hello, sweetheart," said Jack. "I picked this tramp up out at the ranch. He told me a pretty yarn, but I think he's working for our friend, Joe Burke. How's everything?"

"Fine, honey. Let's have a look at this tramp. Maybe we've seen him around the lot. Jackie!"

Jack waves me into the living-room. The house is a neat little shack, built

by some poor chicken-rancher and furnished right out of Sears, Roebuck. I guess Jack rented it or bought it as a hideaway. The waiter comes in.

THEN the Honey-Child floats through the door. She's wearing a Beverly Hills negligee and it looks out of place here. But she's a honey, no mistake.

Until she talks. Oh, her voice is all right; it has to be. But the words she knows and uses. I've listened to some rough talk, but not from the lips of a girl who looked fresh and innocent and about eighteen. It was kind of shocking, and when you can shock Bill X. O'Brien you're good.

Queenie shushed her a little, absent-mindedly, and the girl said: "What the hell, mom? Do we have to put on airs for our guest? Of all the dumb-looking—" She put in a lot of bad words, and ended: "he's the dumbest. Did that dirty fixer, Joe Burke, send him out?"

"I think so," said Jack. "Work him over, Dink, and see if there's ten grand on him."

Dink was the waiter. He came at me like a gorilla, shoulders swaying, arms down. I backed off, like I was scared.

"Just shoot the so-and-so!" says my dream girl, Marian Hope. "If somebody don't get Joe Burke out of my way, I'm going back and do the job myself. Then you'll see how quick Grossie kicks in."

I was mad. But I kept backing away. Dink thought he had me cowed. I could see him getting ready to batter me. I still had a headache. But I thought of what Joe said: "You can sock."

I put my hands up to protect my face. I said, "Don't hit me!"

The girl said, "Kill him, Dink."

Dink grinned. This was going to be fun. And he had a good audience.

I shot one up to his jaw, dropped the other into his belly. He was out before he fell and I jumped on him with both feet.

"Yeah, kill him!" I yelled. "Dink and who else? Huh!"

Jack had a gun in his hand, sure. But he was an iceman, not a killer. The hell with him! The girl was another thing. She snapped a twenty-two—a husband-killer—out of her sleeve and waved it at me. I jumped for her, knocked her arm down, and slapped her as she'd never been slapped before. She dropped the gun and ran, yelling, to Jack.

I was mad enough to charge into his leveled gun, but his eyes had gone bad.

"Hold it, shamus. Move again and I'll have to kill you. I don't want to. Queenie, throw some water on Dink. When he comes out of it, he'll be glad to take care of this dick. Sit down! Suppose you grab that telephone and get your buddy, Joe. Suppose you tell him your number's up and beg him to tell Grossberg to pay off. Grossberg's willing. Imperial can stand it. There's no reason for Joe to be stubborn about other people's money. If he's a friend of yours, maybe you can talk sense to him."

"You can go to hell," I said.

Dink was stirring. Queenie had soaked him with water. Now she poured a slug of whiskey down his throat. He started to get up.

"You'd better reconsider," Jack said. "Dink . . ."

Dink glared at me.

"Wait a minute, Dink!" said Jack. "Give the cluck a chance. If he don't grab that phone in a minute, you can have him."

Even an O'Brien can stand just so much. It was awful quiet there, and all

I could think of was the big boom Dink's gun would make and how that would be the last of Bill X. O'Brien and how the girls in the Frisco office would miss me.

I began to reach for the phone. Jack sighed. He sounded like he was relieved. He wanted a hundred grand, with no blood on it; Dink just wanted blood.

I LIFTED the phone. Then I heard a voice. I was so mixed up I thought it came out of the phone. But it didn't.

A motorcycle cop was standing in the door, saying "Good evening, everybody!" in a nice, friendly, familiar way.

I mean, he looked like a motorcycle cop; he had on a cop's uniform; but his voice was Joe Burke's.

I dropped the phone.

Dink swore, dragged his gun and fired—as quick as that. But I guess he didn't know Joe had been a champ pistol shot before he became a movie fixer.

Joe got Dink right in the heart.

"Now everybody sit down and relax," he said, as if he killed people every day.

The Honey-Child began raving at him, using some of the worst words.

"Tut, tut, my dear," said Joe. "When I'm through with your education, you'll be a nice girl. Did you know your mama and papa were going around the world on a long long cruise, with a couple of friends who will slap their wrists and whisper, 'Naughty,' every time their fingers itch? Yes, that's so. And you, Honey-Child, are going to be cherished and protected as never before. Yes, you are! You won't stand for it? Remember your salary, sweetheart. How'd you like to have your face all spoiled, so you couldn't be in a picture ever again? Huh? Just ask yourself whether Joe Burke is mean enough to fix it that way. You bet he is!"

Jack shrugged. "Looks like we'll have to go straight, Queenie. When does the ship sail, Mr. Burke?"

"Tomorrow," said Joe.

"Say!" I said. "When you get through planning world cruises and education for a female wildcat, tell me what you're doing in a cop's rig and where you came from!"

"When you suggested that I have somebody tail these two," said Joe, "I took the job myself. I told you the town was in my vest pocket. It was no trouble to borrow a motorcycle and a uniform."

"It was you on the boulevard?" I said. "I thought they lost that cop."

"Try losing a bloodhound some day," Joe laughed.

Well, I hadn't delivered the girl. Joe found her himself. There went my five grand.

But I was wrong. Grossberg himself, in person, handed me the check.

"Now you can relax and enjoy Hollywood," said Joe. "Where would you like to go?"

"To the airport—and Frisco."

I PRESSED the buzzer. It was the blonde babe's turn.

"Toots," I said, "how's for dinner and a show?"

"Goody, goody! There's a new Marian Hope picture—"

"Nix!" I said. "Any show but that!"

She pouted. "But aren't you going to tell me about Hollywood? Did you speak to Mr. Burke about getting me in pictures?"

"Babe," I said, "there's five grand in the O'Brien poke, burning to be spent. You want to help? On one condition: never say Hollywood to me again!"

Private War

By Cleve F. Adams

Author of "Double Shuffle"

Through a haze of rage, Steve saw Jake Kleinschmidt in the doorway, and there was a gun in Jake's hand

A Deeply Moving Novelette Of The Conditions Which Face A Police Detective In A Great City

THE dark glasses might have fooled McCloud but the girl's voice never. He'd heard it too many times, dreamed of it too many nights. It was the kind of voice that got under a guy's skin. Singing, laughing—or with a sob in it, the way McCloud had heard it last—it was a swell voice and went with the gal that owned it.

He was standing at the gun rack in Kent and Nichols', looking at a new sporting rifle, when she came in. It was pretty dark in the corner on account of the rain outside and they hadn't turned all the lights on yet. She went right by McCloud without seeing him and stood at one of the hardware counters, tapping nervously on the glass. She had on galoshes and a tweed coat, and her little felt hat was tugged far down on her head so that you couldn't see much of her face except what showed below the dark cheaters. Her breast moved under the tight-buttoned coat as if she'd been running. All this McCloud took in with evident enjoyment.

A clerk in shirt sleeves came up from from the rear of the store and pulled

a ceiling light switch. "May I help you, Miss?"

"I—I want a file, please."

The clerk looked mildly surprised. "A file?"

"Yes. Something that will cut steel quickly, please."

The clerk swung a series of hinged sample boards, came to the file layout and waited, very bored, for the girl to take her choice. McCloud didn't move till it became quite evident that she didn't know one file from another. It wasn't that he didn't want to see her; it was just that she'd made it quite plain after the trial that she didn't want to see him, or, for that matter, anybody else who had known her. So he waited, and the clerk fidgeted, and the girl seemed to have an awfully hard time explaining what she wanted to file, and McCloud finally came along the aisle and stood looking down at the top of her head.

"Hello, Sherry."

She didn't turn. "I'll—I'll take that one," she said, pointing.

McCloud took her elbow, swung her about. His other hand went under her chin, tilting her head back. "Sun glasses on a rainy day are kind of screwy, even to a dick," he said. His voice was very gentle for a big man, though. "You wouldn't cut an old friend, would you, Sherry?"

Her fine mouth quivered a little, and something that might have been a tear, or maybe it was a rain drop, crawled out from under the shell-rims. "Stephen!" she said, trying to put a lot of pleased surprise into it. "Stephen, how nice!"

He grunted, dug down in a pants' pocket and paid the man for the file. "See you home, Sherry?"

"No," she said. "Oh, no, thanks. As a matter of fact, I'm not going home. But do look me up soon, will you, Stephen?"

Still holding her elbow he steered her up the aisle. "You mean that, Sherry? You're not sore because I put the heat on George?" She said she wasn't, and he said, "Well, that's swell, then, but where'll I look? You're not at the Preston any more."

"No, I'm not at the Preston any more. I—I couldn't stand the publicity, Stephen. I'm at the Crillon now."

They stood on the walk under the awning for a moment and he saw that she had a cab waiting. He put her in it, gave her the paper-wrapped file. "Tomorrow too soon, Sherry?"

She gave him a tight little smile. "Tomorrow will be just right," she said, and then the door slammed and McCloud was standing alone in the rain, not minding it a bit because his foolish Irish heart was singing an echo to the promise in her voice. A swell voice, that. And a swell gal. 'Course she'd married the wrong guy, but by this time she knew that, on account of the guy was right this minute on his way up to San Quentin to do a twenty-to-life stretch. McCloud sighed luxuriously and walked down to the Grotto, intending to get a steak and a pint of ale.

A PLEASANT place, the Grotto. In the windows as you went in, there were lighted glass show cases with fish and lobsters and one thing and another, and while McCloud never ate fish himself he thought it was a swell idea. As usual at six in the evening there was a crowd; mostly the gang from around the Court House and the Hall of Justice. Dicks, shysters, bail bond runners and a jurist or two. Everybody knew McCloud and there was always a seat waiting for him, no

matter what the hour, because Joe De Luca liked him.

Tonight people acted sort of funny, though. It was as if McCloud's entrance was a signal for absolute quiet. Knives and forks hovered in mid-air, and guys that knew McCloud well just stared at him blankly and then looked hastily away. It only lasted a second, then the din was resumed and everything looked the same as usual, only Steve happened to be sensitive to things like that.

He paused at the cigar stand, leaning his elbows on it, and grinned at Joe De Luca. "What is this—a rib, Joey?"

Joey said it wasn't a rib, and shoved a folded extra across the glass. He was a little man, very fastidious about his dress and immensely proud of his teeth. The teeth were unbelievably white under the tiny waxed mustache, but De Luca wasn't smiling. He said, "Where you been the last coupla hours, Lieutenant?" and tapped a shiny-nailed forefinger on the paper.

McCloud looked down. It took about two seconds for the news to penetrate, but when it finally did his stomach tied itself in a knot. He wasn't scared. He was just stunned, on account of he'd planned big things after meeting Sherry Cecil, and now he knew those things could never happen because he knew why she'd been buying that file. It seemed that George Cecil, who was by way of being Sherry's husband, wasn't on his way up to Quentin after all. He was in circulation again and when last seen had been sporting a pair of steel bracelets. That's what the file had been for. He'd had help getting off the train, and one of the two dicks guarding him was now dead. McCloud felt sort of responsible for that, because he hadn't gone himself.

Joe De Luca was saying, "Well, I hope you see him first, fella," and McCloud remembered that George Cecil had sworn to get him—when and if. So that was what was biting all these mugs. They liked McCloud, but they were betting on George Cecil.

He said, "Yeah, well, thanks, Joey," and took the paper with him as he went down the right hand line of booths. Guys nodded to him now, and said, "Hiyuh, McCloud," and he nodded back, a trifle absently, because all the time he was thinking about Sherry Cecil and her swell voice, and about a file and a pair of steel cuffs on a killer's wrists.

He decided he wouldn't have the steak He'd sort of lost his appetite, and, anyway, the skipper would think it was funny for a guy to be eating steak when he ought to be out on the pavement looking for a lead. He had a couple of quick ones at the cocktail bar, was just turning away when somebody laid a hand on his shoulder.

It was the skipper, Captain of Detectives Rex Kilgannon. He said, "Run over to Headquarters with me, Steve. "We've hauled in Farmer French and a couple of his rods. Maybe we can get something out of them."

McCloud said "All right," in a matter-of-fact voice and followed Kilgannon back up the aisle and out between the glass cases of fish and lobsters and what have you. There was one lobster that looked big enough to be the twin of the thing that was slowly tearing McCloud's heart to pieces. Not that even Kilgannon knew there was anything wrong; McCloud's worry, if any of it showed, would be put down to the natural feeling of one dick over another's death—and maybe just a touch of jitters on account of George Cecil's threat. There weren't a lot of people

knew what Sherry Cecil meant to Big Steve McCloud.

THEY cut diagonally across upper Broadway, walking because it was just a step or two, and the water in the gutters, plunging down the hill from Temple, gurgled and razzed McCloud for being a sucker. It kept asking him questions, like why didn't he call the Crillon or, better still, take a squad and go down and put the collar on George and Sherry Cecil? He could have said it was because they wouldn't be at the Crillion; not after Sherry had told him the Crillon, anyway. Only he knew that if he was on the level he'd make the try. There was a cop ahead and he wasn't doing anything about it. Hell of a note.

Kilgannon's short, thick legs were hard put to it to keep up with McCloud's sudden burst of speed. He panted, "Hey, lug, there isn't any fire!" McCloud slogged on, not saying anything, just thinking. They got into the Hall of Justice and took the elevator up to the seventh. Kilgannon's office looked like a convention hall. There were three or four dicks, and Kilgannon's assistant, Jake Kleinschmidt, and the night skipper of the uniformed squad, and a civil clerk, all ready to take down anything Farmer French and his hoods might care to divulge.

French had sent out for a bottle and a swell time was being had by all. On the surface. The cops were playing nice and pretending it was all in the day's work, one of them being gunned out, and French was sympathetic as hell about the whole business.

He was a square chunk of a man who liked to pretend he was just one of the boys and deliberately cultivated a manner that went with the "Farmer" tag someone had pinned on him. He had thick gray-black hair and brown skin, which he'd probably gotten from a sun-lamp, and twinkling good-humored dark eyes under a thatch of gray-black brow. His voice boomed at McCloud.

"So the heat's on, eh, boy?"

McCloud shrugged, took off his hat and shook the rain from it. His hair was thinnish, brushed carefully back from a center part and so light it looked almost white under the lamps. He had sort of grayish-green eyes and a healthy, well-conditioned pink skin that made him look younger than he really was. He sat down beside the skipper's desk, put his hat back on and thrust white, capable hands into top-coat pockets. He didn't say anything and Kilgannon coughed nervously.

"Well, unh, we can't hold French forever, Steve. You got any questions you want to ask him?"

McCloud said, "Sure, but will he answer 'em?"

Farmer French laughed boomingly. "Now, now, McCloud, you ought to know me better than that. Haven't I always cooperated?"

"If you mean coming down here whenever you're asked, sure. If you mean spilling anything after you get here, no. Not that I blame you, Farmer. If I was in the rackets I wouldn't talk either. Only thing is, you became Number One when George Cecil took the rap. Looks like it'd be as unhealthy for you as for me to have him running around loose again."

French nodded his big square head at the room. "Just what I've been telling the boys, McCloud. I wouldn't pretend with smart guys like you that there isn't money being made in this county. George always treated me okay, too, but just the same the organizations have run a lot smoother since

you put the bee on him. Everybody satisfied and no squawks. Why should I want George out again?"

Jake Kleinschmidt held thumb and forefinger to his nose. "Organizations, bah! Rackets is what I call 'em and rackets is what they are. And we let these guys come in here and walk right out again." Jake had a brother in the produce business, and the brother was paying off, and Jake, even as a lieutenat of dicks, couldn't do anything about it, which naturally made him very sore.

McCloud forgot about his own troubles long enough to grin at Jake's red, perspiring face.

The grin went away when he looked back at Farmer French. "Okay; it's a swell yarn the way you tell it, but there's plenty angles. George Cecil couldn't appear as the number one guy again. Not with the heat on him. Still and all, there's lots of guys in your—um—organization that liked him. Maybe you *had* to spring him to please the boys." He watched the two hoods as he said this, but he couldn't tell anything from their expressions because they didn't have any.

French's face lost its jovial look, got wooden. "All right, McCloud, you don't like me and I admit that goes double. Just the same, I don't like the idea of George Cecil being out any more than you do. Besides, I've got an alibi and so has every one of my boys." He broke off as the door opened.

Herman Schwartz came in. Schwartz was French's attorney and had been George Cecil's attorney. He was a dapper little man with black shoe-button eyes and a birdlike manner. He cocked his narrow head on one side, regarded French quizzically. "I heard you were down here, Farmer. Any trouble?"

"Not a bit," French boomed. "Not a bit, Herman." He looked around the room, chuckled. "The boys and me never have any trouble, do we boys?"

The boys all shuffled their feet and admitted they never had any trouble. All but McCloud and Jake Kleinschmidt. McCloud never shuffled his feet at any time, seldom expressed any kind of emotion. He just looked mildly speculative while Jake chewed his nails in an excess of frustrated rage. It was these two that French didn't like.

Hermy Schwartz rubbed his hands together. "Well, then, we might as well be going, eh, Farmer? I've got something I wanted to talk over with you."

French and his two rodmen started toward the door and Captain Kilgannon said, "Now, wait a minute, wait a minute. I've got a couple men out I haven't heard from yet."

"Checking my alibi?" French asked.

Kilgannon scowled. The phone on his desk rang and he yanked it to his chest. "Hunh? Oh, all right, you can come in." He put the phone down and waved French away. The Farmer and little Hermy Schwartz and the two hoods went out, arguing amiably over who was going to win the fight at the Hollywood Legion Friday.

Captain Kilgannon looked disgusted, and Jake Kleinschmidt said in a choked voice, "You oughta! Every time that mug comes in here I wonder why I ever let him get out again. Well, why do I?"

Kilgannon said wearily. "I dunno, Jake. I don't even know why you keep asking crazy questions like that. There's nothing I'd like better than to— Oh, hell, what's the use talking about it?" He pulled a heaped-up report basket to him, snapped: "Well, what are you guys waiting for? Get out on the street. Find this mug Cecil and it won't hurt my feelings a bit if

you bring him in dead!" To McCloud: "You need any help, Steve?"

McCloud said he didn't. He went out with the rest of them and read the paper on the way down to the street. They'd yanked George Cecil off the train at San Fernando. One eye-witness said there'd been two cars filled with gangsters; another said there were two men in a sedan. The dick who was still alive didn't know whether the guys had come in a plane or a steamship. They'd just appeared all of a sudden, and there were a lot of shots and the next he knew he was all over blood, and Fogel, his partner, was dead.

McCloud kept saying this to himself, sort of like a ritual. "Fogel is dead, Fogel is dead. A square guy and I know where the mug is that killed him, or anyway that is responsible, and what am I going to do about it?" He looked a little tired around the eyes.

II

HE went down the ramp from the main floor and got his own car out of the police garage. It was still raining as he turned down Broadway and the flasher-lighted marquees of the theaters and neon facades of the cafés were reflected in the oily black asphalt. The tires on the car ahead of him squeezed little geysers out of the car tracks.

After a while he turned right and crossed over to Figueroa and then into Wilshire, and five minutes along Wilshire brought him to the Crillon. He parked and went into the ornate lobby, asked the man at the desk for Sherry Cecil's number. There wasn't any Sherry Cecil, the man said. McCloud pulled his badge from a trousers pocket and described Sherry very minutely. He could do this, he found, without even closing his eyes. Funny thing, the way some people made an impression on you. There still wasn't any Sherry Cecil, though, not even under another name. McCloud believed the clerk because the Crillon was that kind of a place, and anyway he'd been almost certain before that Sherry had lied. He just wanted to be sure.

He wedged himself into one of the row of phone booths and dialed the Yellow Cab main office. Having put Sherry into a cab he naturally remembered the cab's number. McCloud was like that. It didn't take such a lot of brains to do what he was doing. Determination, maybe, but not brains. After a while they located the driver for him and McCloud got an address on West First Street. He went out there.

It was a kind of down-at-the-heel neighborhood. In the good old days the city fathers and the big-shot pioneers had lived along here because it wasn't so far from the Plaza; just far enough out to get away from the screech of stage-coach wheels and the dust of milling horses. A lot of the old houses with their bulging windows and jig-saw cornices were still standing. Some of them had hopeless looking cards stuck in lace-curtained windows offering rooms for rent.

Number 812 was like that, only it didn't have any card. It stared wide-eyed and blank-faced at McCloud as he rolled by. There were lights in the back of the house, though.

He parked, came back on foot and mounted tall steps to the sagging porch. The bell still worked. He could hear it 'way off somewhere when he leaned on the button. He took his gun out of the shoulder holster and put it in his top-coat pocket.

There was a wait of maybe a couple minutes, then a light went on in the

front hall and the diamond-cut colored panes in the big front door made a sort of rainbow effect around Sherry Cecil inside. She opened the door.

McCloud took his gun out and said, heavily, but as if his mind was made up and he wouldn't brook any argument: "I've come for George, Sherry."

Down the hall, back where it was very dim, a guy said, "Get out of the way, Sherry. I'm looking for him, too." That was one thing about George Cecil: he wasn't a rat. Sherry just stood there for a second, eyes fixed on McCloud with a blank expression as if she wasn't really seeing him. One small hand started up to her mouth, but she let it drop before it reached there. Not the hysterical kind, Sherry.

THERE was a cough, a dragging footstep down the hall, and McCloud got a brief flash of a vague shadow and the bright gleam of metal. He pushed the door wide, flinging Sherry back with it, and lifted his gun. She screamed then, not loudly: "No, McCloud! No, Stephen, please. He's wounded!" And like an echo came a flat report. Something lifted McCloud's hat off, and part of his scalp too, it felt like. Blood ran down into his eyes and he brushed at it impatiently, tried to sight his gun. He couldn't seem to lift it, it was so heavy, and then there was another shot and the slug must have hit his gun, because it suddenly slammed back against his heart, knocking all the breath out of him. He sat down, not out, but very near to it, and the light in the ceiling looked miles away and was doing tricks that no light had any business to do. There weren't any more shots.

He got an arm up finally and wiped a sleeve across his eyes. His wind came back with a great sucking *whooosh*, and then Sherry, who had mysteriously vanished, came flying back and was down on her knees, cradling his head in her lap.

"Stephen! Oh, Stephen, darling, are you hurt badly?" It was very pleasant to have a girl with a voice like that calling you darling, but a guy couldn't stay on the floor forever. He rolled over and got up, pretending he hadn't heard what she'd called him. Dames sometimes said things they didn't mean, and anyway there was the little matter of George Cecil down the hall.

McCloud shook his big head, to clear it of the buzzing noises, and Sherry put a hand under his elbow, steadying him. He still had his gun. He pushed it out in front of him, started along the hall. Sherry clung to him.

"Stephen, don't you understand? George is dead!"

That snapped him erect. "Whadda you mean, dead? I never even fired a shot!"

She was crying now, not noisily, and McCloud, somehow feeling that it was all his fault, put an arm around her and they went toward the still huddle back there in the shadows. George Cecil was dead, all right. Nobody would ever be any deader. He didn't have any shirt on, and there was a whole slew of bandage wrapped around his chest. Blood stained it from beneath and there had been a hemorrhage recently because a lot of the blood had come out of his mouth, too.

McCloud pushed the girl away, turning her around, so she wouldn't have to look, and got down on his knees beside all that was left of the great George Cecil. He'd been a handsome guy, George, and not a rat, even if he had been in a ratty business. Funny about this shooting. McCloud knew he hadn't done it. So who had? The cops

on the train? Nope, the paper had said they hadn't fired a shot.

He got up presently, knowing that whoever had fired the slugs, it was Cecil himself who had caused his own immediate death by getting out of bed to gun McCloud. The exertion had done it. Out in the street a siren wailed. McCloud looked at Sherry there against the wall, thought swiftly that maybe he could keep her out of this. He fumbled the key to his flat out of a pants pocket, thrust it in her hand.

"Beat it, Sherry. The cops'll be here in just a second, now, and I'm going to try to keep you in the clear. Go to my flat—you know where it is—and I'll see you there later." He took her shoulders in his two hands, gripped down hard. "But no more runarounds, see? If I have to go looking for you again I won't be playing. My car's down the street. Scram."

The siren was very close now. McCloud went to the door with her, cursed as he saw the two cops tumbling from the prowl car in front. He knew they'd seen her but sent her on down the steps anyway.

ONE of the men said, "Now, wait a minute, sister. Not so fast. What goes on here?" He grabbed Sherry by the elbow, spun her around and then he looked up and saw McCloud. "Oh, it's you, Lieutenant! We got a call that there'd been a shooting."

McCloud said, "There has. Let the lady go and come on up."

There were a few pople in the street now. This part of town was apparently used to minding its own business when the cops were involved. The cop let go of Sherry's arm and she disappeared down the sidewalk. The pair came up to the porch, and McCloud led them along the hall to where he'd left Cecil. Only George Cecil wasn't lying as McCloud had seen him last. Somebody had rolled him over and his pockets had been turned out. They were quite empty.

McCloud hardly heard the awed, "Jeeze, Lieutenant, you sure wrapped him up for keeps!" He didn't even bother to tell the mug that it hadn't been he who had done the wrapping. Somebody had searched Cecil right under McCloud's nose; at least in the short minute he'd been up front with the girl. That could mean but one thing: someone had been in the house all the time, and Sherry had known it and played him, Big Steve McCloud, for a sucker. Twice in one day. One side of his mouth lifted in a sneer at himself, and his eyes looked bitter, disillusioned. The little tramp had called him darling.

He shivered suddenly, said, "Okay, you and Grogan bottle the place up. See that no one gets out."

"You mean there's more of 'em?"

"I don't know," he said heavily. "There might be. Anyway, I want to have a look around before we call Headquarters. On your way."

They split, tramped to their posts, muttering.

McCloud went through the house pretty fast after that. Nine rooms, there were, most of them unfurnished. He found where George Cecil had lain, and this room showed signs of a hasty search too. There was a couch used as a makeshift bed, and on the table beside it was the file and a pair of handcuffs. McCloud wiped them absently with his handkerchief in case the girl had left her prints, and suddenly woke up to what he was doing and cursed savagely. Still trying to cover her. What a sap! He put his mind on George Cecil's escape. Something very

screwy about that. McCloud was positive that neither of the dicks on the train had had a chance to shoot. Yet undoubtedly Cecil had been shot. Add that to the search of the corpse just now and what did you have? You had plenty.

Lips tight, gray-green eyes very hard now, McCloud went to the wall phone and jiggled the hook. The operator answered instantly. This dump must have been one of Cecil's hole cards, held in readiness against just such an emergency as this. Headquarters answered and McCloud asked for Captain Kilgannon.

"Be right over," the skipper said. He was very pleased over the whole thing. "Nice going, boy."

McCloud said yes, it was swell. He hung up and found Cecil's coat and vest, and whoever had searched the guy's pants had been here too. The pockets were as empty as McCloud's stomach felt. Not that it was the dinner he'd missed; there was just sort of an aching hole in his middle that he didn't think would ever get filled up again.

WHILE he was waiting, he buzzed the supervisor and asked if there had been any outgoing calls from this number between four and six. Cecil must have phoned Sherry, and if he had, then he had known where to find her. McCloud knew by this time that there wouldn't be any use looking for her at his flat. She'd slipped him again.

The supervisor's voice crackled in his ear and he noted something that he'd subconsciously tagged about the skipper's voice, too. Sounded like the diaphragm and magnets in the receiver weren't working right. They were working good enough for him to get an address out in Glendale, though. He thanked the woman and wrote the number down in his little book.

Captain Kilgannon came clumping in on his short, thick legs, looked around the room and sniffed, took McCloud's arm and led him out into the hall. There were a lot of guys clustered about George Cecil now. Several dicks, a couple of the boys from the lab, two reporters and little Herman Schwartz. McCloud wondered how Hermy had got in on this. Must have been hanging around Headquarters when the call came in, and having been Cecil's mouthpiece he'd naturally be curious.

Kilgannon said, "Let's see your gun, McCloud," and Steve hauled it out.

The skipper looked at it, smelled it, did everything but taste it, and finally, very red in the face, yelled: "What goes on here, anyway. You never shot the guy, McCloud!"

"Did I say I did? I just told you he was dead."

"Sure, but—well, blow me down! Then who did it? Neither one of our boys got a chance to squeeze a trigger."

McCloud said, "Unh-hunh, that's what I thought, too. I've got an idea that the gun right down there on the floor is the one that plugged George Cecil. I think he took it away from the guy that plugged him. You find any more bodies around town this afternoon?"

Kilgannon snapped his fingers, remembering something. "We did pick up a guy! Over by the river in an ash can, and come to think of it he was one of Cecil's old mob. Now why didn't I think of that?"

"I guess we've all missed something about this crackpot train break. I don't believe George Cecil planned it, or knew a thing about it till it actually happened. But *somebody*"—he looked

hard at little Herman Schwartz—"wanted Cecil loose, and not because they liked him either."

"You mean he had something?"

"I mean he had something. Might have been evidence that'd keep his mob in line till he was sprung on parole. I don't think so, though. If French, or Hermy here, had anything to fear from George Cecil; if he had anything he wanted to spill, he'd have done it before now. I think it's dough, myself. I think he had plenty stashed away some place and somebody wanted it."

Schwartz' little shoe-button eyes glinted. It might have been amusement, though you couldn't tell in the half-gloom of the rear hall. "Believe it me, McCloud, George never had so much money left as you hint, and who should know it better than his—now—counsel?"

McCloud said, "Farmer French, maybe?" and Hermy Schwartz chuckled and rubbed his hands together.

"There you go, McCloud, always cracking jokes. You'll kill me one of these days."

Lieutenant Jake Kleinschmidt, coming in with a deputy M. E., overheard this last and vouchsafed a dire prophecy. "If he don't, somebody else will, Schwartzy, and I hope I'm there to see it."

Schwartz said, "You should live that long, *schlemiel.*"

Captain Kilgannon barked, "Cut it, you two. This is a murder inquiry, not a Hitler feud."

The doctor got up off his knees holding a slug in a pair of forceps. "Thirty-two," he said. "Maybe the same gun, for all I know. You'd better let me patch up that groove in your head, McCloud." He got some mercurochrome and adhesive out of his bag, and McCloud took off his hat and stood there twisting it in his big hands while he got taped up.

A couple of dicks came up leading one of the harness bulls. "This mug says there was a frail around, Skipper. McCloud told 'em to let her go."

KILGANNON got a sort of magenta color, and his short mustache stuck straight out. "So you let her go, huh? Who was she, McCloud?"

McCloud said, very steadily: "I wouldn't know, Skipper. Just a dame that happened along and heard the shots. I told her to beat it." He knew he wasn't fooling Kilgannon, though. The skipper was plenty smart.

Kilgannon said, side-stepping for a moment because he never liked to argue before subordinates, "Tell me what happened, boy. I mean, how come you smelled this place out?"

McCloud made up a good story. Everybody knows you've got a perfect right to protect your stoolies, so you don't have to tell which one it was or how you got the tip. "So I eased up to the porch," he finished, "just feeling the place out before I called a squad. The door was unlocked and so I came in, but George must have heard me because he let me have it before I could do more than get my gun out. The effort made him spring a leak, though, and he was dead when I got to him."

"And this girl came in after that?"

"That's right, Skipper." McCloud felt like a heel. Why was he lying like this? Just stubborn, he guessed, or maybe he was afraid of being razzed. Even as he thought that, he knew he was kidding himself. There was still a teeny-weeny little hope at the back of his mind that Sherry would really be waiting at his flat. It wasn't much of a hope, but he had to be sure, didn't he?

And all the time the little devils kept hammering at the ache in his head. "You're a sucker," they chuckled. "And she's a tramp."

Captain Kilgannon looked baffled, but all he said was, "All right, clean it up, you guys. Check that gun against the slugs you took out of Cecil. Maybe it's like McCloud says."

Steve edged toward the front door. Jake Kleinschmidt and Hermy Schwartz came along behind him, still arguing, and the three of them went down to the street together. McCloud's car wasn't where he had left it. He felt a little better at that. Maybe Sherry would be waiting for him. Not that just waiting would square things, but still and all it might not be so bad.

Jake Kleinschmidt said, "Ah, nuts!" at some remark of Hermy Schwartz, and addressing McCloud: "You going my way, Steve?"

Steve said he was and they got in the department car and left the little lawyer standing there looking after them with lively speculation in his bright little shoe-button eyes. It wasn't till they were well away from the district and almost down to Headquarters that McCloud asked Jake to drop him off.

"I want to run up to my flat for a minute, Jake. I feel like I was blood from head to foot."

Kleinschmidt pulled in beside a cab rank. "I gotta get back," he said. "With both the skipper and me off the desk you never know what'll happen, but you're always sure it'll be bad. This case is a long way from being broke, hunh, Steve? I mean, say your dope is okay, and that somebody's after something Cecil has stashed away. Even if Cecil killed the mug we found in the ash can, and the mug killed Cecil, there's still plenty angles. There was at least two hoods mixed up in the break, mebbe more, and we gotta get 'em all do we want the killing of a cop cleaned up right."

McCloud said, "That's the idea, Jake." He remembered something. "I guess I owe you a vote of thanks for talking me out of escorting George up to Quentin myself. It might have been me that was dead, hunh?"

Kleinschmidt nodded gloominly. "I get premonitions sometimes," he admitted, and when he thought on account of Steve's grin that he was being ribbed, he growled: "All right, all right! But just the same it happened, didn't it?"

You couldn't argue with that. Only it seemed too bad that Jake's premonitions didn't include *all* the details. Steve said, "Well, I'll be seeing you," and caught a cab. It was after nine when he got out in front of his flat. No sign of his car but he was still being hopeful. Sherry might have put it in the garage.

IV

HE WENT into the little foyer—it was only a four-family building—and got his spare key from where he always hid it under a potted palm, and after that he took the carpeted stairs two at a time. He tried the door, found it locked. The lady on the opposite side of the landing opened her door and looked at him. She said, "Oh," when she saw McCloud, and added: "I thought I heard you come in a little while ago." As if she were paid to keep an eye on his comings and goings. Snoopy old lady. She wore spectacles pushed up on her forehead and no doubt they'd have shattered had she known it was a girl she'd heard using his key.

McCloud said no, she must have been

mistaken, and waited for her to close her door before he opened his. She withdrew, turtle fashion, but still suspicious. She must have been reading the papers about the evil lives led by detectives. He went in quickly, shut the door behind him and stood very still on the threshold. The lights were on and there was an almost imperceptible perfume that told him Sherry had been here. But Sherry wasn't here any more. She'd left a note. He strode to the table, picked up his key and the hurried scrawl under it.

> Stephen, I can't wait. I feel as if I'm being watched every minute. Since George was convicted someone has been dogging my footsteps pretty consistently, not bothering me in the physical sense, but making me uncomfortable. The reporters were bad enough, but this—well, after what happened to George, it's rather frightening. Perhaps you hadn't better know where I'm going. Believe me, I know and appreciate what you did in letting me go, and it's only because I'm afraid your kindness will backfire that I'm getting out from under your feet. Your car is in the garage.

McCloud tore the note to bits, slowly, methodically, his square capable hands moving as if this were very important and had to be done just so. He tossed the pieces in the fireplace then, and went out to the kitchen and poured himself a drink. He felt he deserved one now.

So Sherry had been tailed all the time her husband had been in the clink. Well, that tied in with McCloud's own theory that George Cecil had something somebody wanted. This certain somebody thought Sherry might know about it, too. Farmer French, the new Number One? Little Hermy Schwartz, counsel for both Cecil and French? Now, there was a funny thing, Schwartz showing up with the cops like that. Funny, too, that Cecil had taken the rap without squawking if there was any bad feeling between him and his lieutenants.

Still, Cecil wasn't a rat, and the killing McCloud had pinned on him was purely a personal matter. Therefore he wouldn't have any reason to squeal, and as long as he hadn't all during the trial, it didn't look as though anybody had any reason to worry about the future. So what did that leave? It left dough. Or information that could be turned into dough. Somebody had sprung Cecil under the guise of doing him a favor, only they'd gotten careless and Cecil had figured it for a cross. He'd managed to get away, killing at least one hood and getting the business himself. Still with the cuffs on, too, poor devil.

So why hadn't he called Farmer French? Because he was as scared of French as he was of the cops. That left only Sherry. Yeah, she was the kind that'd help even a yellow dog if it was hurt, and George Cecil had been her husband. Naturally she'd gone.

McCloud washed up and got out a new topcoat. He was just shrugging bulky shoulders into it when someone rang the bell. Just to be on the safe side he got his gun out, held it down along his right leg and, twisting the knob with his left hand, stepped back as the door came open.

CAPTAIN KILGANNON said, "Oh, were you expecting somebody?" and looked at the gun. McCloud put it away, feeling foolish. The skipper came in quietly enough, closed the door behind him in the same quiet fashion, but you could see trouble in his eyes. He stood squarely in front of McCloud, his short, thick legs spraddled out, fat, hairy hands hanging straight down but curled a little at the tops. McCloud knew the signs.

He'd seen those hands ball into fists many a time.

Kilgannon said, "You've been with me a long time, boy. Too long to start crossing me and the department now. Where is Sherry Cecil?"

McCloud looked blank. At least he hoped he was looking blank. "Sherry Cecil? Why, I wouldn't know, Skipper."

One of Kilgannon's hands lived up to its promise and made a fist. The fist came up with unbelievable swiftness and cracked McCloud square in the mouth. He fell back, putting up his own hands instinctively, but used them only to ward off the skipper's follow-up. He was a head taller than Kilgannon and could probably have taken him because the Old Man had a lot of years on his shoulders. But hell, the skipper was—well, the skipper.

Kilgannon saw he wasn't going to fight back and cursed him. "You're the first mick I ever saw that wouldn't take a chance. I guess that's all you could expect of a rat, though, even an Irish rat. Look, McCloud; I came here before going some place else, just to give you a chance. Do you come clean, or do I take your badge off you and go out and get the girl myself?"

McCloud's eyes got a dangerous light in them but his voice was quiet, even a little resigned. He'd always known the skipper was smart. If he said he could find the girl, he probably knew what he was talking about. Anyway it was no time to argue.

"All right, Skipper, I'm a heel as far as you and the department are concerned. I tried to cover Sherry because —well, because I figured she'd had trouble enough."

"And because you're nuts about her!"

"Okay! I'm nuts about her. I knew you smelled something, but how did you find out for sure?"

Kilgannon laughed shortly. "Figured the Old Man for a sap, hunh? Figured I swallowed your lies hook, line and sinker. Why, you poor dimwit, I even know how much you paid for the file!"

McCloud's lips moved but no sound came out. Was this guy smart or was he smart? Curiosity got the better of his judgment finally, and he said, "How'd you know about that?"

Kilgannon snarled: "The price tag, screwball! I found it on the floor. Talk about dumb! Hell's bells, McCloud, you might have at least got rid of the price tag!"

McCloud thought, "Well, this is it. He's got me deader'n a mackerel. The way it'd look to anybody in their right mind I helped the girl buy the file, and naturally I'd know what it was for. Maybe I'm even supposed to have cut the cuffs off him myself." Aloud he said, "The tag had Kent and Nichols printed all over it, of course, and you got hold of the clerk and he remembered me as if I was his own brother. Look, Skipper, would you believe it if I told you I had no idea? That I didn't even know George Cecil was on the loose when I paid for that lousy chunk of iron? Why should I buy a file when I had a key?"

Kilgannon said, "Sure, I thought of that. Maybe that's one of the reasons I'm giving you a break. Say you didn't know. You found out later, didn't you, and let the girl walk out right under the cops' noses? Fact is, you even tell 'em she's okay. She's an accessory, and so are you, and if you don't turn her up I'm going to throw you in the can and go out and get her myself. You think I don't know where she is? Why, I've forgotten more tricks than you'll

ever know. A phone supervisor gave me the address in Glendale. Surprise, surprise!"

It was a surprise, too. McCloud was so surprised that, almost unconsciously, he brought one up from below his knees and hung it on the skipper's chin. Kilgannon was braced so that he hardly moved out of his tracks. He just sighed a little and sort of melted down to the floor and lay there looking quite peaceful, though a trifle astonished. McCloud stared down at him gloomily. After a while he mumbled something that sounded like, "Now that's just swell. The end of a perfectly delightful evening. Not to mention a career." He put on his hat, being very careful to get it at just the right angle, and went out, closing the door softly behind him.

The lady across the hall popped out, like a cuckoo bird. "Did I hear something drop?"

"I think so," McCloud said. "If you listen real close you'll hear something else in a few minutes. Don't let it bother you, though. It'll just be a guy named Kilgannon pretending he's a steam roller."

HE WENT down the stairs and around to the garage at the rear. It was dark in the alley, darker than that in the garage itself, but Sherry had left the doors open. Steve went in on the left side of the car, reached in to turn the dashlight on and somebody shoved a gun in his right kidney. There was something about the way it was done that told you it was a gun and not a banana, and what the gun's owner said proved he'd had a lot of experience at this sort of thing.

He said, "Let's play nice, shall we, copper?" His voice was gentle, almost caressing. "I'm awful glad you didn't bring your pal down with you, because I'm all alone. Guess I'll be enough, though, hunh?"

McCloud had one hand on the light switch, the other frozen to the door handle. He could have maybe kicked the guy in the shin or something, but he had a swell idea that it would be his last kick, so he just kept on leaning inside the car and said he liked to play nice.

"Well, now, that's keeno," said the guy genially. "What I always say is a copper's got just as much sense as a human being. Or almost, anyway. If you stand up now, I won't have to reach so far."

McCloud straightened, and the gun went away from his kidney and smacked him on the skull instead. It was very neat. This guy had so much experience that he could call his shots to a sixteenth of a second. When McCloud opened his eyes he was still half in the car and just starting to slide, but the guy had gone clear around, gotten in and was closing the right hand door. He hooked the gun under McCloud's chin, not hard, just enough to snap him wide awake. "Time to get up, baby. We got a long drive ahead of us."

McCloud grabbed for the gun, seeing it was so close, and the guy was faster than he was. He didn't grab anything but thin air, and the guy's left fist collided with his nose. Right on the spot that starts you crying. And then the guy's left hand snaked the gun out of McCloud's shoulder clip, and he sighed. "My, my, I heard you were a tough guy to get along with."

McCloud was so mad he couldn't speak. His throat felt full of blood and his lungs were bursting, and his back teeth ached, he was clenching them so hard. But he wasn't silly. He

climbed in under the wheel when the guy said, "Climb," and after a little they were out of the alley and rolling across town.

The guy seemed to think he'd said enough for a while because he didn't waste words saying right or left. He kept one gun in McCloud's ribs and used the other to gesture with. McCloud counted up to two hundred, very slowly, and his blood pressure went down accordingly. Out of the corner of his eye he kept studying the guy's profile, trying to place it. He decided this was one of the two hoods who had been in the skipper's office with Farmer French.

He said, spacing his words carefully: "What have I got that Farmer wants?"

"By me, copper. I was just told to grab you. You and the frail. My pal had to leave when the dame did, and I was kinda worried when Kilgannon showed. What'd you do with him?"

McCloud said, "He's right behind us." It didn't work, though. The guy just chuckled pleasantly and refused to turn around to look. It was discouraging. Especially after what he'd just said about his pal going after Sherry. If Farmer French didn't get her the cops would, and all in all it looked like a stormy night.

French would hardly send a hood that could be identified with him if he was going to turn McCloud loose afterward. So figuring that way, McCloud didn't have a lot to lose by taking a chance now.

V

THEY were coming down the Los Feliz hill into Glendale, with Riverside Drive and a red flasher at the bottom. You're supposed to stop here so it was perfectly natural for Steve to ease down on the brake pedal. From the hood's angle there was no danger because there wasn't a traffic cop within miles. Besides, he had two guns. The thing the hood didn't know was that McCloud's car had mechanical brakes and they weren't synchronized very well. It wasn't raining any more but the streets were still plenty wet.

There was a little cross-traffic on Riverside, and McCloud said worriedly, "You think we'd better stop?" The hood looked and McCloud slammed the pedal down hard. Two of the brakes locked. The car tried to do an Immelmann, botched it and staggered into a good imitation of a barrel roll. The hood cracked his head into the windshield. His gun went off three times but it wasn't in McCloud's ribs any more on account of he had the guy's wrist and was really going to town. Just as the car turned over he got this gun loose, and the hood remembered he had a second gun and turned it on McCloud. The two piled up on the right side of the coupe, the down side, and the car slid along crazily till it smashed into a light pole.

McCloud went out for a minute; when he opened his eyes glass was still raining down on him. The light pole was bent in the middle, like a stooped old man, and trying to peer in through the upper side of the car. McCloud pushed himself off the guy underneath, saw that the guy didn't have a head any more. The door must have come open when the car tilted over, and the guy's head had got itself caught between the door and the frame, and the car had dropped smack on his neck. The guillotine never did a cleaner job.

Outside, brakes were screeching, and somebody was yelling: "Jeez, what a wreck! Jeez, what a wreck!" McCloud

wormed his bulk around till he could get hold of the door handle. It wouldn't work so he knocked the rest of the glass out of the window with his gun and started to crawl out. The guy outside that was telling the world what a wreck it was changed his yelp to "He's alone! Hot ziggety, bring 'em back alive!" He had a bottle.

McCloud took it away from him, said, "Shut up," and looked around. Five or six cars; more coming up. There was a coupé that was pointed in the right direction and only one guy in it. Still carrying the bottle, McCloud brushed its indignant owner aside and went over to the coupé. He showed his badge and the guy opened the door for him.

"Central and Los Feliz," Steve said. "I've got to get to a phone." He nursed a little of the liquor from the bottle.

"Anybody else in that car?"

McCloud told him there was but it didn't matter on account of the guy was very dead indeed. "Quite a polite guy, too," he said, and opening the door at the corner of Central he got out and thanked the man. He gave him the bottle, too, and then he ran on legs that were a little wobbly and sort of exploded into the corner drug store. He dropped a nickel in the phone and watched his finger dialing the number the supervisor had given him. The finger was bloody and so was the rest of his hand, but it wasn't his blood. He shivered a little.

Sherry's voice came to him, sort of strained: "Yes?"

"McCloud. Are you okay, Sherry?"

THERE was a brief wait before she said, "Yes, quite all right, thank you." And then, very desperately: "No, I'm not. Stephen. Oh, Stephen, come quickly. I'm at—" The line went dead. McCloud was out of the store, out in the middle of the street and flagging a cab before his nickel hit the bottom of the coin box. The driver didn't want to argue. Not with the gun, nor with the look on Steve's face They went away from there in a hurry.

Cypress was a dead-end street, curving gently on itself till it ran smack into the cliffs below the glistening white monument that marked Forest Lawn Cemetery. The hundred-foot shaft glowed softly under the caress of indirect lighting, but the street itself was dark, shrouded in the dripping shadow of giant pepper trees and the heavy, sweetish smell of orange blossoms. The little bungalow sat far back in a tangle of shrubs. There was a light behind drawn shades.

McCloud gave the driver a crisp, "Wait," and ran up the drive toward the light. From the shadows a deeper shadow detached itself and somebody said, "McCloud!" in a surprised hiss. Steve put on the brakes long enough to recognize Jake Kleinschmidt. Just then Sherry screamed inside. Not bothering to stop and wonder why the Lieutenant should be here, McCloud ran on and up the steps. The door opened under his hand. A guy came out of another door down the hall, saw McCloud and the gun in his hand jumped as he squeezed the trigger. He squeezed it twice, and the first slug creased McCloud between arm and ribs. The second smacked into the ceiling on account of the guy was already falling when he fired it.

Steve's first try had been a bull's-eye. It looked like the guy had tried to catch to slug in his teeth, only he hadn't been fast enough and it had got by his teeth, making a wreck out of the back of his neck. He was dead by the time he hit the floor. It was the pal of the

guy who'd lost his head; the second of the two who had been with Farmer French.

McCloud hurdled the body, plunged through the side door expecting anything, but all he found was Sherry Cecil. She was in a big chair before the fireplace, eyes closed and a little trickle of blood running down her cheek from a cut on her forehead. Wrists and ankles were taped cruelly tight with adhesive but Sherry wasn't feeling anything. She was out cold.

McCloud went to his knees beside her, mumbling, "You poor kid, oh, you poor kid!" and it was very difficult getting the tape off because the whole damned room and everything in it was all smoked up with a red haze. McCloud didn't know that the haze was mental, born of his own insensate rage. Even Lieutenant Jake Kleinschmidt's fat, Germanic face was tinted with it, there in the doorway, and the gun in his fist was but an added aggravation.

It came to Steve quite suddenly what he must do. Kleinschmidt was behind this whole thing; at least a part of it. Sure, it had been Jake who had tipped French about the train. Jake had sent the hoods to Steve's flat, because he was the only one who had known definitely that Steve was going there: Steve had told him and no one else. And Kleinschmidt was here, wasn't he? How could he have known about this place if he wasn't in with French's mob? The skipper wouldn't have told him.

McCloud was unconscious of putting his own gun away, reckless of the menace of that other gun in Kleinschmidt's fist. Big square hands outstretched, he rounded the chair very carefully, because he was afraid Jake's face might disappear if he took his eyes off it. Then he had Jake's throat and was clamping down hard, and Jake's beating at his head with the gun and yelling didn't seem to make a bit of difference.

The two of them fell down finally, McCloud on top. The gun went off and Steve felt a jolt of pain in his side, and released the throat long enough to take the gun away and toss it aside. One of Jake's big fists came up and clipped him on the button, rocking him, but he went back to the dogged business of tearing that head off its shoulders.

Jake's voice, far away, croaked hoarsely: "McCloud, are you crazy? Steve, have you gone off your nut?"

McCloud grunted, "Yeah, like a fox." He punctuated each syllable with a squeeze.

Then Sherry's voice, very gentle and soothing: "Stephen, please don't. Don't do this thing, Stephen. I'm all right."

He looked down at the purpling face above his hands as if seeing it for the first time. Then, because Jake would keep, and Sherry needed him, he rolled groggily to his feet and stood there swaying. Breath whistled between his teeth, and he made sympathetic little clucking sounds, taking the adhesive off her wrists.

SHERRY touched his head gently. "Oh, Stephen, what have I done to you? You've been wounded again."

"Wounded?" he said vaguely. He put his hand to his side and felt warm blood seep out through his fingers. "Sure, sure, but nothing to write home about, keed. Just a scratch." He looked at her then, keenly. "Look, Sherry, I'm all washed up, so you don't have to pretend any more. George left a lot of dough some place, and French wants it. All right, I'll help you get it. Where is it?"

She looked at him as if he had struck her. "You really believe that! You think I helped him for money."

"What's the use arguing, Sherry? You know where the dough is, don't you?"

"No, I don't! George was very secretive, and even if he hadn't been, I lost all interest in his money when I found out how he made it. All I got out of my marriage, all I wanted, was this little place where I could hide."

"All right, I believe you, but nobody else will. There's a rap out against us for harboring an escaped criminal. Let's you and me find a spot where we can both hide. They tell me South America isn't so bad—if you like it."

Jake Kleinschmidt said, "You're not going to South America, McCloud. You and the dame ain't going *any* place, except to hell, maybe. We're gonna wait here for French and that rat mouthpiece of his, and I'm gonna blow the innards outa every damn' one of you." Jake had his gun again and was holding it very steadily. There was kind of a screwy look in his eyes, as if he were high, or really off his nut. After what he'd just said, it was a toss-up.

McCloud took a deep breath. "Sure, Jake, you want to kill us all. Well, that's all right with me, only how are you going to find the money without me? French don't know where it is. Hermy Schwartz don't know. Otherwise they wouldn't be still trying to find out. Sherry don't know, either. In fact, I'm the only one that does know, so let's be crooked cops together, hunh?"

Jake laughed a little. Not with his eyes, though. "I always figured you for a square copper, McCloud. Until tonight. Just goes to show what a sap a guy can be, hunh? Either you're in with French, or you and the little lady are playing the hand alone. But whatever your angle is, you crossed the department and I don't want any part of you."

Slug-nutty, that's what the guy was. McCloud, watching the gun all the time, said, "That sounds kind of funny coming from you, Jake. The fact that you're here ties you into the deal with French. The skipper never told you about this place because he was trying to give me a break first. And somebody on the inside slipped French the dope on what train Cecil was riding. I'll give you this, though: You saved my life by talking me out of that trip. Or were you afraid French's hoods couldn't take me like they did Fogel?"

The screwy look went out of Kleinschmidt's eyes for a second, but it came right back again. "All right, if you're so smart, where can I find the dough?"

McCloud, sparring for time, or a break, said, "Cecil must have had the dope on him. Not the money, but the means of getting it, maybe. If it was as much as I think he couldn't carry the dough around with him. It wasn't at the house, or you guys would have found it. My idea is that there's a key, or a receipt, or something that'll show where the stuff is."

"There wasn't any key, or any receipt."

"You guys just don't know where to look, Jake. Did you ever think of looking inside the telephone receiver?" He was just guessing, but it might be a good guess at that, on account of the skipper's voice, and the supervisor's, had sounded kind of funny. He wished Sherry would cough, or something, to distract this guy's attention for a second. She didn't, just sat there wide-eyed, and he began to bunch his muscles for a try in spite of the gun. Some-

one moved in the hall and, looking over Kleinschmidt's shoulder, he saw that it was the taxi driver. The mug had a monkey wrench in his fist and it looked about two feet long.

He inched inside the door, winked at McCloud, who looked carefully away so that Jake wouldn't notice. There was a sudden dull thump. Sherry caught her breath in a little gasp, held it. McCloud looked. Jake Kleinschmidt was down on his knees, just beginning to topple over on his face, and the gun in his hand made another dull thump when it hit the floor.

VI

THE driver looked a little white around the gills. "Every time," he said, "every time I hafta do that I always get sick afterwards.'

McCloud said, "If you get sick I'll hold your head, bud. I owe you plenty for that." He got down on his knees and examined Jake. Not even a crack in the skull; the guy must be made of reinforced concrete. Even as he thought this, his vision blurred and a lump crawled up in his throat because Jake had always been a swell egg, and even a cop sometimes needed extra dough.

He stood up. "Well, I guess we'd better scram."

She looked at him; looked at him as if they were quite alone and the taxi bandit wasn't standing there with his mouth open and drinking it all in. "I'm sorry, Stephen. I've been a worry to you for a long time, haven't I?"

He shrugged. His light hair was all mussed up and there was a bitter droop to his lips, but the gray-green eyes smiled down at her. "You're an awful nuisance," he agreed. He took all the money out of his pockets, around forty dollars, and gave it to the guy with the monkey wrench. "Take us back to Los, fella, and then forget you ever saw us. Can do?"

The guy said he had a terrible memory. They started down the hall and the driver stumbled over the hood on the floor. "I done that before," he complained pettishly. "Comin' in. The guy must be dead."

McCloud said, "I think so too," and got between the dead guy and Sherry so she wouldn't have to look at all the details. He was so busy doing this that it was Sherry who saw the skipper first. Kilgannon was blocking the front door. He said, "Stand still, you," and the gun in his hand made it unanimous. They stood still. The driver hefted his monkey wrench suggestively, looked at McCloud who shook his head. Kilgannon didn't miss a thing. He took one step forward, slapped the driver with the flat of his gun. "Like that, hunh? Where do *you* fit in all this?"

The mug said he didn't. He said it was all just a mistake, on account of he was only trying to protect a fare, and what with all the shooting going on, and dead guys tripping you, and this and that, it was all very disconcerting.

Kilgannon barked, "Dead guys, hunh? Seems like they follow you around, don't it, McCloud? First George Cecil, then we pick up your car and there's a guy in it without a head, and here's another hood that if he ain't dead I never hope to see a stiff. A regular little private war, hunh?"

McCloud said it wasn't very private. He didn't feel like kidding. It was just a thought. Kilgannon said it was too damned private for an honest cop to be mixed up in. "That lets you out, though. You're crooked."

Sherry said, "He is not!"

The skipper said, "Oh, yeah? Well,

your recommendation just makes it that much tougher on McCloud." He looked at the driver's badge number. "All right, you—I can find *you* whenever I want. Scram out of here and phone the Glendale cops." The driver went out, shaking his head.

Kilgannon gestured with his gun. "Let's see what's inside."

THE driver looked a little white room, and Jake Kleinschmidt wasn't there any more. Far down the street there was the roar of a motor, and the open window told McCloud how Jake had got out. He felt relieved at that, more than anything else, because it would be tough on the Old Man to find out his whole staff was crossing him. And then he got a very funny idea indeed.

"Skipper," he said, "I think I can lead you to Farmer French on a tie-up that won't be pleasant for you, maybe, but will definitely dunk the Farmer. He's in this up to his neck. You know it and I know it. But proving it is something else again. Even identifying the two hoods won't help because they're dead. Hermy Schwartz could spring Farmer on a writ so fast it'd make your head swim."

The skipper twirled the cylinder of his gun. He didn't look as if he wanted to shoot anybody, but McCloud knew he was seething inside. Kilgannon was a fanatic about anything affecting the department's reputation. His florid cheeks were taut.

"Not pleasant for me, hunh? I've had to take plenty in my time, including this caper of yours, McCloud. I'll bust this town wide open if I have to. So what?"

"We'll have to go back to the house on First Street, Chief. And we'll have to hurry. I've a hunch that French will be there too. There's something there he wants."

Kilgannon's eyes flickered from McCloud to Sherry. Steve couldn't tell what he was thinking. Then, swifter than light, the skipper's left hand darted out, patted McCloud's empty holster, his pockets. "All right," he said. "I'll give it a whirl. You'll do the driving."

They went out and got in the skipper's car, McCloud under the wheel, Kilgannon and Sherry in the tonneau. Kilgannon kept his gun in his lap all the way back to town. There were two cars parked in the same block as the First Street house, not in front of it but farther down, and McCloud didn't know whether that meant anything or not. He rounded the block to the alley and they all got out. It was pretty dark in the backyard. Kilgannon kept nudging McCloud with the gun, and holding onto Sherry's arm, and the three of them went stumbling over old tin cans and one thing another till McCloud lost his temper.

"For crying out loud, Skipper, this is supposed to be a plant, not a bunch of visiting firemen! I'm not going to run away."

Kilgannon hissed back, "You're telling me!" He kept the gun right where it was, and it was lucky he had it out, at that, because just then a guy opened the back door and looked out. Faint yellow light identified him as Herman Schwartz. Herman had a gun. He saw McCloud first and lifted the gun in both hands, as if it were very heavy, and the gun went boom-boom-boom, but Hermy must have closed his eyes, woman-like, because none of the slugs hit McCloud.

The skipper's thirty-eight barked, just once, and Herman Schwartz sat down, looking surprised. Then Mc-

Cloud was on him, wrenching the little shyster's rod free. From the room to the left came the sound of more shots, a whole flock of them, very loud and very close together. McCloud ran in there. Farmer French was against the wall, blood spurting from his face, his throat, his chest, yet holding himself almost upright by hanging to the dangling telephone cord with one hand. He was trying to lift his gun for another shot at Jake Kleinschmidt, half in, half out of the window. It was too heavy apparently. He let it drop, and then the telephone cord snapped and he dropped too. Kilgannon came in, still holding onto Sherry, and dragging Herman Schwartz.

He let go of both when he saw McCloud lifting Jake through the window. Jake was hit, McCloud couldn't tell how bad, but he wasn't dead. He wasn't even out, because when Steve stretched him out on the floor he still held on to his gun, and opened his eyes and looked up at the skipper. McCloud stepped back.

Sherry, over by the door, gave a little startled scream and McCloud turned and saw Hermy Schwartz come to life. Hermy had another gun, or maybe it was the Farmer's. He was pointing this at the skipper's back and muttering gibberish. McCloud yelled, which was all he could do, saw Kilgannon dive out of line, then the gun in Jake Kleinschmidt's fist started belching. It kept right on till there was nothing but empty clicks, and little Hermy Schwartz was nothing but an empty, lifeless shell.

Jake lay back in McCloud's arms. "Worth it," he smiled. "Worth every damn' one of my mistakes just to burn them down when they couldn't wriggle out of it."

McCloud said huskily, "Sure, boy, we all make mistakes. I'm for you, Jake."

KILGANNON came over and got down on his knees, too. "This isn't private, is it?" He got out his knife and slit Jake's vest and shirt open and away from the gaping wound. "What you laying down for, Dutch? You're not gonna die!"

Jake said, "That's—that's too bad, Skipper. I kind of hoped I would, on account of—well, on account of I'm a crooked cop and I know how you hate crooked cops."

McCloud said, "Nuts, Jake! I've been thinking about some of the things you said out there in Glendale and I guess —I guess I kind of misjudged your motives. For a time, when I had you pegged for crooked, I thought all your raving about how you hated the rackets was just an act. But it was on the level."

Jake pushed himself into a sitting position against the wall. "Why wouldn't I hate 'em? Look what they done to my own brother, let alone a lot of other guys. Did the law do anything about it? Not a thing. So I thought I'd play smart. I started doing French a favor now and then, hoping to pin something on him from the inside. He hooked *me* instead. I *had* to play to keep from being busted out of the department. But all the time I kept hoping I'd some day get him and Schwartz in a spot where I could burn them down legally."

He smiled crookedly at the skipper. "Funny, hunh? I guess I must have gone a bit screwy, thinking about things. I mean, being a cop, even a kind of crooked one, it never occurred to me to just go out and shoot these guys. I had to get 'em in a place they had no business to be, so I could smoke 'em and have a good legal excuse."

"Kind of a private war?" the skipper said.

"Kind of." Jake closed his eyes. Kilgannon looked at McCloud and Steve said. "I figured him wrong, Skipper. Plenty wrong. All but one thing. He really did phone the tip I gave him to where it would do the most good. Only thing was, I didn't figure the right motive for his doing it. If you'll bother to look, you'll see that both Jake and I were right." He pointed to Farmer French with the telephone receiver still clutched in his dead hand. The hard rubber shell had shattered at the bell and there was a flat key and a piece of paper on the floor beside it. The skipper got up, unfolded the paper. It was a storage company receipt for a private room.

Jake opened his eyes again, "You got me wrong, McCloud, about how I knew of the Glendale place. I guessed, of course, that you were holding out about the girl. So when you told me you were going home, I beat it out there, got there before you did, I guess. Anyway, I was just in time to see the little lady come out and grab a cab. There was a guy tailing her, and I sort of tagged along behind both of them. You see, she didn't mean anything to me, except maybe a chance to get French. I waited out there in the yard expecting maybe the Farmer would come, and then I could nail him on a kidnap rap, or something. But I never had any part of killing that cop. Farmer promised me there'd be nobody hurt, and I was still hoping for a break. See what I mean?"

McCloud said he did. "The skipper does, too, Jake, no matter how fierce he looks."

Kilgannon got out a handkerchief and blew his nose loudly. He avoided McCloud's eyes and said, "Well, we can't sit here gabbing all night. The cops'll be here any minute, and we gotta get Jake to the hospital. There's a lot of screwy angles to this, though. Why'd French and his mob stall so long? I gotta *know* things so I can make out a good report."

McCLOUD said, "It's all pretty clear, now that we've got Jake's side of it. French's hoods must have lost Cecil after he gunned the one you found in the ash can. Anyway, he got in the clear and came here. They knew he was in the district somewhere, but didn't know the exact place. My guess is that they just patrolled the district till something happened. When they heard him shooting at me, they came an—" He broke off, flushing a little as he remembered how they'd searched the corpse while he was standing at the front door waving goodby to Sherry.

"Well, they came here and what?"

Steve told him. He knew he was a sap and there was no use pretending.

The cops came, and the skipper forgot McCloud for a minute in his irritation at the way a big bull picked up Jake Keinschmidt. "The guy's going to the hospital, not the morgue, dummy! Be careful!"

The bull said, "'Scuse it, please, skipper," and went out, carrying Jake like a sack of potatoes.

Kilgannon bellowed. "I dunno which is worse, private wars or flatfeet." He went to the phone, found he couldn't use it because Farmer French had practically ruined it. He spun about, glared at McCloud who had his arm around Sherry's waist and was leading her out the door. "Hey, you, whose private war was this, anyway? Yours or Jake's?"

"Does it make any difference?" McCloud said. "It worked."

"Foot trail here," the Indian boy called, standing in water up to his knees

Episode of the Hidden Footprints

A True Vignette

By James W. Booth

FROM Island Lake, northward toward the Arctic Circle, word came to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Headquarters at Edmonton, one day in Spring, that a half-breed, known as Sandfly, had been mysteriously missing for more than a fortnight.

So, although the equinox was at its height, with cloudbursts, swollen streams, and fallen trees making progress slow and dangerous, an Inspector set forth to delve into the mystery.

Few men have faced a more difficult task. If a crime had been committed then, to all outward appearances, the elements had arrayed themselves on the side of the perpetrator. Wind and rain had all but demolished Sandfly's shack in a grove back from the lake.

With keen eyes, alert for any evidence of foul play, no matter how seemingly inconsequential, the Mountie grappled with the towering obstacles before him. He knew that if footprints were not visible, perhaps there were hidden ones. And he knew that the sense of touch is highly developed in the feet of Indian boys.

First, evidence of a crime had to be established. The Mountie made a thorough survey of the wrecked interior of Sandfly's cabin. He did not

overlook the dark stains on one portion of the floor. He saw the half-breed's torn shirt, lying in a corner. And he noticed the broken chair near the stove.

He realized full well that the stains might very logically be rain-soaked dirt, which had seeped in, that the shirt might have no significance, and that the chair might easily have been broken when the roof of the shack collapsed.

But he preferred not to accept such an explanation. Instead, he interpreted the torn shirt and the broken chair as evidence of a struggle. The stains he construed as blood stains—evidence that the struggle had ended disastrously for someone. Obviously, Sandfly.

Gazing out across the angry waters of the lake, he realized that the logical place to seek the body was beneath its troubled surface.

If Sandfly had been murdered and his body thrown into the lake, whoever had committed the crime would necessarily have had to carry it to the shore. The thaw had set in at the time. The ground was soft and muddy. Then why not footprints beneath the water which had since risen?

Such was the Inspector's reasoning, on which he acted at once.

SUMMONING an Indian boy, he bade him take off his shoes.

"I want you to feel around with your toes and see if you can find footprints—a trail of them," he said.

The Indian youngster considered it great sport.

"Foot trail here," he called, standing in water almost to his knees.

"We'll follow it," said the Inspector.

They did. It was slow, laborious work. They finally came out on a rise of land on the lake shore. Drawn up on the beach was a birch-bark canoe.

"Sandfly's boat," the boy declared.

The Mountie nodded grimly.

The boy picked up the hidden footprints again at the water's edge.

"They head out into the lake."

"Follow them as far as you can," he was told. "Then dive and see what you can find."

It was the Inspector's theory that somewhere off this spot the missing half-breed's body would be found. The canoe indicated that to him.

Twenty feet off shore, the Indian boy got over his head. For nearly an hour he dived. Finally, he came up with a grim expression.

"Body of a man down there," he announced with a shudder.

There was. It was Sandfly's, and plunged in his back was a knife.

Hidden footprints had proved murder and led the Mountie to the victim's body. Now his knowledge of the Indian's ignorance of scientific detection was to lead him to the murderers.

He learned that two Indians, Joaquin and Kammekowat, had been drunk with Sandfly on several occasions, and that they had fought.

He ordered them brought before him. He showed them the knife.

"There are fingerprints on the handle," he told the two Indians. "No two sets of fingerprints are alike, and these prints belong to one of you. It will be easy to find out which one. But first, do you want to confess killing Sandfly? It will go easier with you if you do."

The two Indians confessed they had killed the half-breed in a drunken brawl, and thrown his body into the lake.

The Mountie's hunch about their ignorance of scientific methods had worked. There were no fingerprints on the knife.

Publicity Stunt

By Bert Collier

They Thought Honest Lonnie Prade Was Lying to Protect the Crooked Mayor, But They Didn't Know That Prade Was Doing More Than That —to Ruin Him

"You double-crossing ward heeler! I'm going to kill you, Angus Danders!"

DETECTIVE LONNIE PRADE discovered it gave you a queer, jumpy feeling inside to know that within a couple of minutes somebody would start shooting at you.

It would have been better, far better, if the thing could just have happened. Without his knowing anything about it. Then he could follow his instinct, dive head-first from the automobile into the howling crowd, crack a head or two with his sap and be a hero—or a goat.

But he did know about it and that was the hell of it. He sat in the front seat of the car beside the driver, fighting for control of his twitching nerves as he glued his eyes on the cheering throngs that lined the streets. From time to time he waved wild arms to tear away the strands of paper streamers that floated down from the high office buldings. He had to be ready for instant action when the shooting started.

People are saps, he decided. Cheering themselves hoarse over an old frog like Mayor Danders. Everybody knew he

was a crook. Everybody in town knew and laughed about his pet quip: "If a politician steals a dollar, he's a thief; if he steals a hundred grand he's a statesman!"

Out of the corner of his eye Detective Prade could see the Mayor just behind him in the rear seat. He was doing himself proud in this last personal appearance before the election. The top of the car was down and he sat on the back of the seat, his face a ruddy, grinning moon. He wore a loud suit of gray checks and he held a long, unlighted cigar between the fingers of his right hand, while with his left he waved his derby hat.

He looked like a cartoonist's idea of a political bandit, which raised Detective Prade's opinion of the imagination of cartoonists. Because that, in Prade's mind was what Mayor Danders was—a political bandit.

Prade's watchful eyes bored through the crowd ahead, past the big placard carried by four cavorting men. The sign read: *Re-elect Mayor Danders—an honest man.* Detective Prade had no eyes for that travesty on the truth. He was staring hard at a thick knot of humanity congregated at the point where two of the main streets crossed at right angles.

A man was edging through the crowd, a furtive, thin little man whose hat was pulled low over his eyes. He was so thin he was able to slide through with scarcely a ripple. But Prade saw him. Prade saw every move he made, counted the times he stopped, watched him pull and push and sidle until, at last, he stood on the front row, almost touching the elbow of Traffic Officer Partain.

Of all that laughing, cheering throng gathered to cheer for Mayor Danders on election eve only Prade, whose job it was to guard the Mayor from harm, had eyes for the little man. Only Prade noticed that the man's hand was thrust deep in the pockets of a tattered coat and that the pocket bulged far more than it should from the mere presence of a fist.

Detective Prade saw that the man was "Tiny Tim" Anderson, once a deputy in the city tax office. Anderson had been an honored and respected citizen. Until he crossed Mayor Danders. Danders broke him, smashed him, kicked him out.

He stood now on the corner, a shabby figure with blazing hate in his eyes. Prade felt sorry for this husk of a man, even though he knew that Tim's pocket, where his hand nestled, contained a revolver; even though he knew that when the Mayor's car reached the intersection the revolver would flash out and Tiny Tim would become the central figure in a grim melodrama.

Prade slipped out of the encumbering folds of his overcoat. While he was struggling with its bulk a yipping, excited fat woman, wearing a big Danders badge, ran along the side of the automobile. "Hello, big, blond and handsome," she yelled and threw a handful of confetti in his face. What Prade said was not complimentary to the lady or her ancestors. Mayor Danders heard him and his laughter boomed out over the crowd, reaching even to Tiny Tim. Tim winced.

PRADE choked back his profanity and leaned against the cushions, trying to look natural. Ahead of them the band began to play the theme song of Mayor Danders' rival, Theodore Chalmerson. They played it as a funeral march. Boos and jeering laughter came from the crowd. The pace of the marchers became that of a funeral

cortège. The Mayor's automobile crawled. It did things to Prade's nerves, creeping along like that. It was hard on Tiny Tim, also. He shuffled and the fingers of his left hand twitched spasmodically. His skin was the color of ashes. In that laughing, cheering crowd, his face was a death's head, somber, frightening.

The dirge ended and the band burst into the Danders campaign music, bright and gay. Some of the crowd took up the words and the marchers moved like soldiers hearing mess call. The Mayor's car came, with each turn of the wheel, inevitably, to Tiny Tim. On and on. Prade tugged at his sap. Tim caught the detective's eyes and his face turned green.

"The lousy bum," Prade scowled at the little man. "Lost his nerve!"

The car drew abreast of Timothy Anderson, then past him, and began to move away swiftly. Prade had to crane his neck to see, and his head ached with strain.

Suddenly, as if by magic, Tiny Tim's fist was gripping a revolver. Light crawled along the dull steel of the barrel. His shrill voice knifed hysterically through the din of the crowd.

"You double-crossing ward heeler. I'm going to kill you, Angus Danders!"

The revolver roared. Prade saw how Tim's puny claw of a hand jerked with the force of the recoil. The air was full of screams and frantic cries. Traffic Officer Partain, almost touching the tattered man, stared at him with his mouth gaping, his face a picture of astonishment.

With a whoop of release from the tension of waiting Prade dived over the side of the car and his heavy bulk hurtled between the Mayor and the would-be assassin. He seemed to smother the form of Tim in that flying leap. In midair he heard the revolver explode again, almost against his body. There were more howls and screams and the blurred movement of frightened people.

Prade's hands clutched at Tim's chest. But Tim was like a greased pig and the clawing fingers found no grip. Prade's 200 pounds of muscle and bone struck Tim a side-swiping blow and slid past him to the pavement. He came up in an arena walled by humanity. Sectors of the crowd see-sawed before his eyes. He was alone in their midst facing a little man who hugged a smoking revolver.

The detective began to swing his fists.

The newspaper boys, who jammed the press car behind Danders' automobile, agreed later that the fight was an epic. They sat in awed, paralyzed silence while their brains raced to discover new adjectives to describe the reckless bravery of the detective, the desperate fury of the gunman. One of them toyed with the idea of comparing them in his story with the wild bull elephant and the cornered panther, and decided regretfully he couldn't get it by the city desk.

But even newspaper reporters don't know everything. How could they tell that Detective Lonnie Prade was putting on the finest show of his career? How could they learn that by his lunges and wild swings and misses he was making the frantic Tiny Tim appear as dangerous as a cornered wharf rat?

All at once Traffic Officer Partain became a factor. He conquered his paralyzing surprise and ran in, swinging his sap, aiming a blow that would have cracked Tim's thin skull. Prade leaped desperately. He caught the loaded leather on his shoulder and the raking force of it spun him around into the

policeman's arms. His face brushed close to Partain's ear.

"Lay off, Partain! Let him get away! It's a stunt!"

Partain's eyes went wide and he staggered and almost fell. His brain, which seldom had a problem more difficult than a right turn on a red light, was still reeling from the surprise of Tim's sudden pistol fire. As if by accident Prade pinned his arms as they waltzed across the pavement, struggling for balance.

Tiny Tim started running. Hoarse warning cries came from the mob that melted away from his path. Prade broke free and dashed after him, tugging at his revolver. He fired three shots, aiming carefully into the opening of a storm sewer.

The last hardy watchers zipped for cover. Nobody wanted to help as long as bullets were flying.

HALF a block away Tim darted into an alley between tall buildings. Prade raced after him. As soon as he was out of sight of the crowd he slowed down and let Partain puff up even with him. The traffic officer's face was red and sweating.

He panted: "What the hell, Lonnie? What the hell?"

"Keep after him, Partain," Prade ordered swiftly. "But whatever you do, don't get him!"

"What the hell, Lonnie?" Partain's vocabulary was limited in moments of stress.

"Mayor's order."

There were no more questions. Every man in the city's service understood what that meant—instant obedience, or plenty of trouble. Partain began to run after Tiny Tim, but his heart wasn't in it.

Prade turned on his heel and walked slowly back into the chill fall sunshine. Mayor Danders' automobile was the center of a seething mass. Nobody paid any attention to Prade as he shouldered his way through the crowd and climbed back into the car to his place beside the driver. Danders was trying to make a speech. As the detective slumped wearily against the upholstery and pulled on his overcoat again he caught a few demagogic phrases.

"—miraculously saved from a dastardly killer—saved to lead our city into a glorious future—"

Prade felt sick with disgust.

Someone in the crowd yelled: "It's a fake! It's a fake! It's a stunt to get votes!"

A sudden silence fell, appalling even to the hardy heckler. But suddenly the crowd, reckless now that the danger was past, and ashamed of its own panic, took up the cry with parrot-like cruelty. Mayor Danders' face went livid. He waved his arms and commanded them to listen, but his words were tossed aside on a tidal wave of accusation. He sat down suddenly as a phalanx of the police riot squad came pushing toward them.

"Get going!" Mayor Danders snapped to his driver. "Get going. Ride 'em down, if you have to."

The motor roared, the siren whined its angry song. Men and women darted from the path of the wheels. The car crawled, gathered speed.

BY the time they reached the city hall the newsboys were shouting the extras.

"Attempt to kill Mayor! Opponent charges fake! Read about it!"

"Quick work," Prade growled. Mayor Danders didn't answer. He skipped out of the car and dashed for the side entrance of the building. The

detective was on his heels as the Mayor stamped across the deserted hall and through the rear door of his office.

Garland Fisher, Danders' campaign manager, fat, bald and red of face, was pacing the floor. He stopped short as the Mayor and detective came in.

"How did it go, Angus?" he asked eagerly. "Did Tiny Tim—"

"Yeah! And played hell, too. The crowd got on to it. It was a lousy stunt, even if you did think of it!"

"Me?" Fisher cried, his face mottling with anger. "It was your idea, Mayor. You thought of giving Tim Anderson a grand to shoot at you—with blanks—to make it look like he was trying to kill you. You were the one that thought it would get you enough votes to sweep you into office again. Don't try to put it off on me!"

"Don't argue!" the Mayor roared. Then his voice went suddenly sly. "It's too late for that now. We've got to face it, Garland. Who knows about it?"

"Just us and Tim and Lonnie."

Mayor Danders squirmed around to study the face of his bodyguard for a long minute. Prade stood stiffly against the wall, hands deep in his overcoat pocket, meeting Danders' eyes with a defiant scowl.

"Honest Lonnie Prade!" Danders said softly. "Honest Lonnie Prade! You hate me, don't you, Lonnie?"

It was more of a statement than a question. The detective growled: "It's not a secret, Mayor. I didn't ask for this job."

Danders grinned. "I wanted one honest man around me, Lonnie. Whether you like it or not, you're in on this now. You were along when I arranged the damned thing with Anderson, even if it was under orders. You saw me pass the money. You saw me hand him a gun loaded with blanks. I ordered you to let him get away after the shooting—and you did. If the people in this town knew that, it'd be the end of me—and you too, Lonnie."

Prade said nothing, but his gaze was intent upon the sleepy eyes of Mayor Danders.

"Honest Lonnie!" The Mayor went on with a strange, menacing softness. "The people of this town know you, Lonnie. Your simple word is better than my oath. I ain't kidding myself. If you whispered it they'd believe it."

He fell silent and in the quiet of the office they could hear the distant shouts of the newsboys and the hum of voices in the anteroom.

"In a few minutes the reporters will be here for a statement. Chalmerson's charge is a sensation. I could deny it until I was blue in the face, but it wouldn't do any good.

"But when they come, Lonnie, you're going to tell them the shooting was on the level!"

Detective Prade's face was gray and he leaned more heavily against the wall. He cried: "You're ordering me to tell them Tiny Tim really tried to kill you?"

"You haven't got to, Lonnie. I'll say this, though. Even if I lose, I'll break you like I did Anderson. I'll hound you out of this town. All hell can't save you, Lonnie, and you know it."

Prade walked stiffly to a chair and sat down. He was thinking of a lot of things—twenty years of service in the police department and not a black mark on his record. Thinking of the way his friends had of calling him Honest Lonnie Prade, with something of affection and faith in his integrity.

Danders and Fisher began to whisper, their round, bald heads close together, like pumpkins on a shelf. Danders made a couple of telephone calls.

He was talking in low tones into the mouthpiece when Johnnie Cohen, his secretary, stuck his head in the door. His eyes danced.

"The newspaper boys are here, Mayor."

Danders slammed the receiver into place and turned to Prade. The detective got up and went to the window, gazing out into the late afternoon sunshine. There were excited crowds in front of the city hall, and they seemed to buzz with the developments of the past hours—the attempted assassination, and Chalmerson's charge that it was just a publicity stunt to get votes.

He turned slowly. "Okay. Let 'em in. I'm ready for 'em."

THEY flooded in through the door, the city hall and the political writers, pretending to be weary and bored; but their eyes glittered with excitement over the big story that had dropped into their laps.

"Well, what about it, Mayor?"

Collins of the *Star,* tall and slim, peering through plain gold-rimmed glasses, acted as spokesman.

"About what?" the Mayor bluffed.

"Chalmerson's charge."

The Mayor tried to make his voice unconcerned. "Just a desperate move of a beaten man."

"Hold it, Mayor," Collins cried sharply. "Listen to this first. Chalmerson's backing up his charges. He got some pictures from a news photographer who was standing by Partain. The pictures show this gunman holding the pistol. Chalmerson says if he was shooting real bullets, there'd be holes in you or in the wall of the building across the street. There aren't any holes. We all looked."

Mayor Danders came to his feet slowly, his face hot and red. He seemed to choke for words. He struck an oratorical pose. But before he could speak, Garland Fisher caught his arm and jerked him into the chair.

"Shut up, Mayor!" He smirked at the reporters. "Man," he said, "we don't have to answer that charge. It ain't any use. Anything we'd say would be politics. But I want you to ask somebody else. A guy who won't give a damn for politics—a guy who'll tell the truth. Lonnie Prade!"

With one accord they looked at the detective. Prade was leaning against the wall again; there were tight wrinkles about the corners of his mouth and his face was drawn. They looked from him to the grinning fat man who ran the city government and back to the detective again. They all knew Prade. The name they had helped to give him—Honest Lonnie Prade—was the accolade of their esteem.

Collins said, almost in a whisper: "Okay, Lonnie. Here goes. It was just a publicity stunt, wasn't it, old timer?"

Prade's face became more gray. The wrinkles around his mouth grew tighter.

Collins snatched a cigarette from his pocket, jabbed it into the corner of his mouth and forgot to light it.

"Damn you, Mayor! Putting Lonnie Prade on a spot like this. If he tells the truth—it's his job!"

Mayor Danders said without rancor: "Scratch that remark off the record, boys. Go on, Lonnie—say it!"

The detective gave them a wan tired grin. He spoke so huskily they had to strain forward to hear him.

"It's the real thing, boys. The real thing!"

That was all. They had their story and they knew it, but as they filed out on dragging feet, they were whispering

among themselves. Another good man bludgeoned into the muck of the politics of Mayor Angus Danders. Another man forced to lie for his job. And of all people—Honest Lonnie Prade.

It was a story they wished they could get out of writing. The lousy business of being a newspaper reporter was hell anyway.

They went out, sped by the echoes of Danders' jeering laughter—out to do their job of telling this story to the public. Some to the telephones, some to the teletypes. And some to the offices to pound out stories that began on the theme: "Detective Lonnie Prade is loyal . . ."

They were thinking about Lonnie as they did their work. But Danders and Fisher, having used him, forgot about him. They plunged into the job of repairing their fences, of undoing the damage that Chalmerson's charge had made.

PRADE walked through the door to the anteroom and took up his post in his chair outside where every person who came in must pass under his eye. Many people came through the door that night—rich and poor, men and women, all tied to Danders through selfishness or through fear. Prade saw them all and admitted them all. That was his job.

It was a job that seemed unending as he sat there, still wrapped in his overcoat, his hat perched far back on his head.

The night became old, and then the morning was young, and still they came. Not until daylight, when they scattered to the polls to ride herd on the voters did the stream stop.

It was just a delusive calm before the real storm, a few minutes for them to snatch a bit of breakfast. Danders and Fisher went out for a shave. Prade lay on the Mayor's couch for a cat nap.

The day became a nightmare. Feverish activity in Mayor Danders' office. The jangling of telephones, dashing messengers from outlying precincts, reports from ward captains on the progress of the voting. At six o'clock, when the polls closed, everything stopped. Crowds fell off and that was an ominous sign. A little after six the flash came in from the first precinct, a box far up in the new subdivision on the Heights. The count was Danders, 82; Chalmerson, 107.

There were more like that, in a monotonous succession. At eight o'clock Danders called Prade to his desk. He was alone and he was wearing a sickly grin.

"They beat us, Lonnie. We're out for four years—but it was a fight."

"Tough!" said Prade flatly.

Danders said: "All the dirty rats are gone. All the guys I did favors for. They deserted. They're out yelling their heads off for Chalmerson."

"That's politics," Prade told him.

"I never did a favor for you, Lonnie, but you stuck. I don't know why. If it hadn't been for you telling the reporters the shooting stunt was straight, it wouldn't have been a race — just a landslide."

Sounds of distant cheering drifted from the streets. Auto motors raced and backfired. A band played somewhere, and it was Chalmerson's campaign song.

"I don't know why you did it. But I ain't forgetting. Next week there'll be a gold badge for you, Lonnie. You'll be a lieutenant."

Prade cried: "You can keep your badge, Mayor. I don't want any favors from you. I'll take my chances with Chalmerson."

"You're a stubborn fool," the Mayor snapped. "Get out! Get out! I'm tired of seeing you around."

Prade walked out of the office and into the street, through crowds cheering for the victor. The collar of his overcoat was turned up around his ears. His face was hidden in its folds. No one recognized him.

He walked to a taxi stand and rode home. When he got out, Collins of the *Star* was sitting on his doorstep.

Collins said hello and watched him curiously as the detective climbed the steps and let himself in with his key.

Prade looked very, very weary. His shoulders, normally square and straight even after such days as these last, were slumped now, and only a fierce inner fire seemed to keep him going. His mouth was a hard straight line. He gestured weakly.

"Come on in, Collins," Prade said. "The old lady's off visiting her folks during all the excitement. She hates being alone. What's on your mind?"

The reporter followed him into the living room.

"I've been waiting for you, Lonnie," he said. "I want to know the truth. Why did you lie for Danders?"

Prade struggled valiantly with his overcoat, grunting a little. When the silence grew awkward, Collins went on:

"You're a square shooter, Lonnie. You hated Danders because he's a crook. Danders knew it but he thought just having you around helped him cover up some of his shady deals."

Prade was still struggling with his overcoat. "Give me a hand, will you, Collins?" he asked.

The reporter walked around behind him.

"You hated him, Lonnie. If you'd told the truth and said the shooting was just a publicity stunt, they'd have laughed him out of town. He'd never been able to run again."

He caught the overcoat by the collar, slipped it off and turned to lay it across a chair.

Prade said slowly: "I'll tell you the truth, Collins. Danders hired Tiny Tim Anderson to fake the shooting. He gave Tim a gun full of blanks. He figured that even if Tim was caught, it would be to the good, since everybody knows Tim had reasons to kill him."

"Why didn't you tell that before, Lonnie?" Collins made sure of the coat and turned to face the detective. "Why didn't you— Holy— Miss— Agnes!"

Prade stood before him, left arm dangling stiff and awkward. The left sleeve of his coat was streaked with dried blood. Two black holes in the fabric across his left shoulder formed a grotesque epaulet.

"Holy Miss Agnes!" Collins breathed again.

"Why didn't I tell it?" Prade asked with bitter irony.

Understanding flooded the reporter's brain, and his surge of admiration for Prade seemed to bring a warm glow into the room. Prade was still Honest Lonnie, the man the town thought he was. Collins felt ashamed that he had doubted the detective's integrity.

"Tiny Tim put in real bullets!" Collins cried. "Tiny Tim meant to kill him!"

"When a man hates like that, he is not overlooking any opportunities!"

"And for twenty-four hours you sat in Danders' office—with that?"

Collins gestured toward the swollen arm. Prade growled:

"Listen, Collins—do you think I'd let him ride into office on the strength of these scratches? Do you think I'd tell that old goat I stopped two bullets that were meant for his fat hide?"

They're Swindling You!

"An Escape from Sharks"

By

Frank Wrentmore

***This is the one hundred and fourth of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial and commercial associations.*—The Editor.**

I AM indebted to Mr. James F. Morton of Paterson, New Jersey, for this story. It is an interesting psychological study, but don't let that scare you, and it carries its own moral.

"Following is a true story which I set down less than a month after it happened, while every detail is crystal clear in my memory. No, the sharks were not the sea-dwelling, cartilaginous-spined monsters called to our minds by the word. They were very agreeable, smooth-spoken gentlemen, who plied their calling in the most refined and artistic manner. In other words, it has been my somewhat unusual lot to fall into the hands of a trio of gaming sharks.

"It was on my Christmas trip to Boston, which I always elect to take by water, when possible. Going early aboard the boat at New York, I sat down in the writing room to while away an hour before dinner by solving a few cryptograms. A very agreeable appearing gentleman strolled into the room and sat down near me. After a moment he passed a pleasant remark, to which I naturally replied. He was also, it seems, on his way to old scenes, as to which he was agreeably sentimental. Another gentleman passing through the room listened for a moment to our conversation, and then joined in. As we continued to chat, an older man of very dignified presence came in to write a letter. However, it did not take him long to like the looks and conversation of our small group; and presently he came and sat beside us.

"He was, as he informed us, handing us his card, a financier who had just returned from an important trip to Washington. After a little, he suggested that we adjourn to his stateroom and have a little drink before dinner. This was agreeable to all, my only stipulation being that my own beverage would be of the non-alcoholic kind. Whereupon, with a most surprising unanimity, all promptly decided that sarsaparilla would suit them exactly. We found the room to be one of the finest on the boat, superbly appointed, with twin beds and a private bath. In a conspicuous position on one bed lay a most opulent looking fur coat. One of the others remarked on the magnificance of its quality; to which the financier replied that it was a favorite of his, although he had just given his wife a much more expensive one.

"Such an agreeable company! All were men of high respectability and conservative views, as their comments

on public events manifested. Presently one of them spoke of the happiness of his own quiet domestic life. He said he had no desire to go far afield for pleasures, but was content with the simple pastimes of the home circle. Very casually he mentioned a new game which had become quite a favorite in their household, the name of it being 'Amos 'n Andy.* One of the others showed interest in this and asked him with what sort of equipment it was played. It seemed that an ordinary pack of cards was all that was needed to play this game.

" 'Ah,' said the other, 'I suppose it is a complicated game like contract, which I never could get through my head.'

" 'No, no,' was the reply, 'it is extremely simple. If any of you happen to have a pack of cards handy, I can show you in a minute and we might have a friendly round or two before dinner.'

"Hereupon, the financier was extremely prompt in producing a pack of cards, which he 'happened' to have brought along. Up to this moment I had been content to take them at their face value, but now I began to prick up my ears with a dawn of suspicion of what was coming and to review in my mind what had already happened as in the nature of a psychologic 'building up' for the real program. I was now fully on my guard and began to determine my own procedure. An open quarrel or indication of suspicion might lead to very unpleasant and perhaps even dangerous results. My policy must be to follow along in apparent confidence, and to slip out from under at the critical moment, without exhibiting suspicion or causing loss of face by anybody. It was my wits against three master artists in craft, but I was embarked too far to draw back and could only hope that my tactics would prevail in the end.

"So we sat at the table, I at the right of the 'instructor.' He shuffled the cards, which I cut for him, then placed the pack face down on the table.

" 'In this game,' he explained, 'the dealer plays first. Colors and suits do not count, but only card values, king being high and ace low. First, each of us puts ten cents in the pot, just to add a little interest. Then, I draw a card which I show to everybody. It is now my privilege to bet either ten cents or the equivalent of the entire pot that my next draw will be a higher card. A tie is the same as a loss. If I win, I take either a dime or the pot, according to which I have bet.'

"SO THE play began, passing to the left, as usual. Betting was mostly of ten cents, with losses and gains about even; so that the pot remained small. I noticed, however, that I won more frequently than anybody else, and recognized the old, familiar 'building up' of which I had so often read, without ever expecting to be the subject of it. Presently the 'instructor' drew a king.

" 'Ah,' he exclaimed, 'I forgot to explain that as there is no card to 'take' a king, the rule is different with this. The first king drawn is 'Amos.' The holder of it does not need to bet anything, but if he draws another king, he wins the whole pot.'

"Whereupon, the gentlemen proceeded to draw, but without success. The playing continued and after about two more circuits the pool had grown

Note:—The editors have heard of this same game being played in the sporty Florida hotels under the name of Keronke-Keronke.

to about two dollars. Hereupon I drew a king, and, to the expressed surprise of all, my next card was also a king, being the 'Andy' of the game, so that the pot came to me. The 'instructor' was volubly outspoken in his wonder, saying that he had only once known this to happen before, and that luck was certainly with me.

"The pack being exhausted, with no sign of willingness of anybody to quit, a new deal was called for. Here, the schemers presumed a trifle on my supposed ignorance, for I was called upon to be the dealer, although sitting on the wrong side of the former dealer! But I said nothing, realizing that this was part of the build-up to give me confidence that there would be nothing wrong with a pack which I had shuffled myself, and the instructor even went so far as to urge me to shuffle them very thoroughly. I did, in full knowledge of the fact that in due course the pack would be switched for an already prepared one, with my attention momentarily distracted, the old adage that 'the hand was quicker than the eye' again coming into effect. I did not attempt to watch for the shift, knowing that it would be too cleverly done for me to detect.

"The altar was now fully ready for the victim. Heretofore, betting had been light and the pool remained small. But now, one after another of the men became a little carried away by their enthusiasm, or so I was supposed to believe. Reckless bets were made on high cards and invariably lost, and by rapid doubling the pool began to reach considerable dimensions. I continued to bet my little dimes and remained far ahead of the game, watching what was going on. The comments of the 'instructor' with his compliments on the 'sportsmanship' of his fellows in their wild betting, had, of course, their psychological intention of impressing on the slated victim the Scriptural direction: 'Go thou and do likewise.' Meanwhile, however, I had been doing a little psychological building-up of my own, preparatory to my Houdini escaping act. Knowing what was coming I began from the beginning of the game to plant in the minds of the players the fact that I was not a gambler and was joining in for simple pastime, but would not, and could not, risk any substantial sums. This was to save both my face and theirs at the crucial moment and forestall any pretext of a row of even the mildest sort.

"And now the moment had arrived! The pot had arisen to the amount of about two hundred dollars. The 'instructor' who had kept mourning that my 'luck' had constantly hindered his chance of making a sweep, since my play was just before his, threw out one more tub to the whale by frankly stating that he had not enough with him to cover the pool but would furnish abundant evidence of his responsibility in case of loss, if he drew a card which warranted his betting on it. But there was to be no more betting! It was my turn to draw, and as I had long forseen, my first card was an ace, the lowest in the pack. This was the pack ostensibly shuffled by myself, with no chance of losing, except by drawing another ace, and with almost a dead certainty of winning—if all was fair. Had I been one shade less on my guard, I could not have resisted it. But resist it I did, blandly informing them that, while I knew my chance of losing was infinitesimal, (sorry my tongue was a bit in my cheek saying this) I absolutely could not afford to take even that minimal chance; that gambling was not my forte; and that it would

be utterly disastrous to me to lose that sum. I reminded them that I had told them this from the start. They tried in every way to break my resolution, finally offering to share the risk with me, so that I would be chancing only about fifty dollars. But it was no go. The bait was attractive, but this fish wouldn't nibble.

"Let me say for the baffled schemers that they were artists to the end. There were no recriminations. It was agreed that if there were no bet on such a card, it would be best to close the game entirely, each of us returning his winnings, which I was glad enough to do. The pack was picked up quickly to prevent me from glancing at the card I would have drawn, but I knew well enough what it was. We separated in an ostensibly most friendly manner, like gentlemen who had simply spent an agreeable hour together, and the 'financier' suggested that we might find one another again after dinner. Thankful to have escaped with a whole skin, I made a beeline for my stateroom after dinner and did not emerge until the next morning.

"The experience was an interesting one, if somewhat trying on the nerves, but I should not wish to expose myself to a repetition of it. However, it illustrates the up-to-date methods of the card sharps who infest the boats. It is not without warrant that signs are posted in conspicuous places, warning all against playing cards with strangers. The modern gamblers are clever in the extreme, and it is probable that they would not use the same precise build-up a second time, or with a person whom they sized up differently. All I can report is what they did with me, and one such adventure is enough for a lifetime."

Very true, Mr. Morton, but I do wish you had looked at that top card

Dancing Cop

BEING a detective often makes for strange bed-fellows. At least, such is the experience of New York's Detective Francis Grottano, who recently took the rôle of an unemployed hoofer in order to catch a group of dope peddlers.

Grottano is tall, dark and handsome and his upper lip is adorned with a neatly-cropped mustache. Put him in a pinch-back coat and a pair of suede shoes and he looks like one of Damon Runyon's characters on his way to Mindy's for a chat with Nicely-Nicely Jones.

After being assigned to the case, Grottano began frequenting the theatrical district. He let it drop that he was an actor looking for a job. He observed three men hanging around the stagedoors, passing small packages to the chorus girls and chorus boys. They paid no attention to Grottano. He was a jobless actor with no money to spend with them.

After several days of this, Grottano one night noticed the three men in a restaurant apparently dividing a number of packages. Then the detective dropped his masquerade. He leaped up, got between his quarry and the door and announced that he was a detective and that they were under arrest. A quick search brought forth 12 "toys" of opium, each worth $20.

Grottano's "strange bed-fellows" were held for arraignment in Federal Court.

—*Ralph J. Brown.*

Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

M. E. OHAVER
"Sunyam"

OUR °Inner Circle Club claims two more new members, who qualified for admission by solutions submitted last June, raising our total °ICC enrollment to eighty-three! The latest °ICC recruits include: °Warren G. Brown (former cryptonym, *Ben Brownie*), Babylon, N. Y., who totaled 1,003 answers with the June 12 issue; and °*Hard Boiled One* (H. L. Baldwin), San Francisco, Calif., who totaled 1,004 answers with the June 19 issue. Congratulations, new °ICC members! Cryptofans who entered our "thousand club" in July will be listed in the Nov. 6 issue. Watch for the announcement!

For the information of fans who may be unfamiliar with our °Inner Circle Club qualifications, it may be well to add that any reader who submits solutions to any 1,000 different ciphers published in this department automatically becomes an °ICC member. Solutions to cryptograms, division problems, and X-special puzzles all count toward your thousand. Answers do not have to be for consecutively numbered puzzles, nor from consecutive issues. °ICC membership is for life or perpetuity. Just send in your answers—we'll keep tab!

The following cryptofans have requested us to publish their total solving scores. The figures given are up to and including June of this year: *920*—†J. G. Meerdink, Jersey City, N. J. *876*—†Lethargic, New Orleans, La. *532*—†Herbert J. Huthwaite, Brooklyn, N. Y. *203*—Ben Shimkus, New York, N. Y. We'll be glad to publish the solving score of any reader upon request.

Turning to this week's cryptic menu, Gracias opens the bill with a neatly constructed puzzle in division. The subtraction L — S = L gives you the value of symbol S. Examination of the several multiplications will then yield symbol N. The key is numbered: *0123456 789*. In †Arrowhead's cryptogram, identify YSA, YSPY, and PY by comparison. Next substitute in the phrase HAMAX XAPNSAR and fill in the missing letters.

The pattern of AMBLB will start you in °Makem Harder's construction. Having guessed this word, substitute known letters in SUAMTKA and supply the unknown ones. The two groups AMTKPFVYP and SUAVBPP will then drop into place. In Tap's message, note BYFU, FU, and VFBY for a starter. Then try for SHNNFRFNFBD, using YFSY and YFSYND as check words. BAHOFUB will be next in line. Thus to KNUA, KTHUFZS, etc.

†Crytonym's cipher exhibits two symbols of unusually high frequency, symbol D (used 15 times) and symbol A (12 times), constituting more than one-fourth of the 99-letter message. Nevertheless, ingress will probably be easier through the endings -B, -P, -BP, and -PB. °G. Fulton's Inner Circle cipher will lead you into the deepest jungle of the unabridged dictionary! Here's wishing you good luck in finding your way out! Asterisks in cryptograms indicate capitals. Answers to this week's puzzles will appear next week.

No. 235—Cryptic Division. By Gracias.

```
R E N ) M N A L M ( A W Y
        L R N
      -------
        C R L L
        C C S S
      -------
          C L L M
          C Y N S
        ---------
              R A M
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No. 236—Up in the Air. By †Arrowhead.

PLA-VYXKNB NGKHYXZ ZGBAD TPLBV KFLPXR PY SKTA VBZVNXPFAX. ACNDPUEV, "TGVS! OAYNSP YSA *YGLAX GQ *OPOAD HAMAX XAPNSAR YSPY SUTS!"

No. 237—Free Seats. By °Makem Harder.

*AUEMASFY *MUGG THBLGTTCP *OFGUNTLVUF *DBDT-LUFG *PAFYUKD. NLTD AMBLB, AMTKPFVYP SUAVBPP NTTAXFGG EFDBP SUAMTKA BRZBVPB. BLET: "*AUEMA-SFY *MUGG."

No. 238—What Price Civilization. By Tap.

*FZEFKZ LFZEU BAHOFUB SHNNFRFNFBD YFSYND KTH-UFZS. BYFU SHNNFRFNFBD FU KNUA GOAPFEFZS YFT VFBY XATLAOBKRND YFSY UBKZEKOE AL NFPFZS. GAAO *FZEFKZ!

No. 239—Round and Around. By †Cryptonym.

DREADSX DRDXAPK, DRDXAET LOVE UADRDXB, DAYD-XBP DAYDLXSY PKSHALF YSBD KYSDG FAHPK EVAPR SOOXSLPB. ZAEP PAN-HSR UAGB YSDB!

No. 240—Exoticade. By °G. Fulton.

ILSEN NVAHLP ELIAAI, MOUNTS DSSDC, TEAHMDROE DSOEN, MLTE NAXDVS SLI MAVLBAU; MTLUAOE MJTUD YDORME; OUYDEEATS SLURATE MAXY; IDVIAETN IAO-UNE PAPAGAYA.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

229—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
S K E P T I C M A X

230—Newly developed drug, "sulfanila-mide," is one of the old-fashioned patent medicine show cure-alls come true! Already it has proved effective with a score of diseases!

231—He was always very reckless,
Driving much too fast, you know;
So today his sad relations
Are behind him driving slow.

232—Lowering clouds obscured vision. Plane plunged headlong into mountain. Occupants luckily escaped injury. Quiz follows.

233—Intolerable ennui seized distraught *débutante*. Observed mob overwhelming news stand, purchasing magazine. Bought periodical, disclosed cryptograms. Boredom vanishes!

234—Acrid imbroglios infract autumn rhythm. Alumna carols naïf impromptu, glee club joins colorful chord. Jocund alumni broach lush magnum.

Readers who send us one or more answers to this week's ciphers will receive due credit in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for October. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

FLASHES from READERS

THE printer is after us again. Let's begin with the letters before he takes this page from us too! A chap with discrimination is

LOUIS FARNAN

whose letter follows:

DEAR EDITOR:

I have been a reader of your magazine for five years and with the exception of a few stories have enjoyed every page of it.

The best way to test the value of a magazine is to read others and compare. I did this. Without a doubt your weekly tops anything in the detective field regardless of price.

You ask for comments on *Graduation in Red*—here's mine. The authors who employ supermen heroes usually have trouble making them seem real and sincere. B. B. Fowler, by a very clever and new idea, makes you feel that his man is possible. The training Barry undergoes, his motives, etc., make his abilities plausible. The story was interesting and exciting and leaves the reader wanting more of the same. How about another one?

Well, so far it has been all praise and no criticism, so I will add one "brickbat." That goes to your true stories. I find them dull. If we must have stories of this nature, why not give us modern crimes or at least those which happened in America? And another thing—well, we'll let it go. Criticizing DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, even if it is intended in a constructive spirit, makes me feel like I am knifing an old friend in the back.

Lots of luck and please let us have some more Barry Chase and Satan Hall stories.

Baltimore, Md.

Perhaps we're unusually insensitive, but we don't feel at all "knifed in the back!"

After Johnny Dolan's foes—and he has so many troubles!—have had their say,

MICHAEL JORDAN

comes along with a kind word for him and Fluffy McGoff.

DEAR EDITOR:

I have been reading your magazine since 1932 and can safely say that it is the best magazine of its kind printed and that's saying quite a lot. I would like to see more stories of the type you printed in the July 10 issue. *Front Page Dynamite* was one swell story although it did seem rather incredible that any man, even a city editor, could act that way.

Let's have more combinations of *Candid Jones* and *Daffy Dill*. Please get rid of *Paul C. Pitt*. He is not a normal character and the stories are all repetitions of the original one. For comedy, *Johnny Dolan* and *Fluffy McGoff* can't be beat.

Stamford, Conn.

It just goes to show.

The letters concerning *Graduation in Red* have disorganized the office and the mail service. Barry and Joe have won thousands of friends, and those friends will be glad to learn that both characters will be back in these pages very soon.

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A New Stoolpigeon Novelette

by Frederick C. Painton

Almost anyone—author, general, lawyer, thief—may win a modicum of fame and passing mention in a history text. But the stoolpigeon may work himself literally to death and is rewarded by a nameless grave.

The Lie

An Unusual Crime Novelette

by Cornell Woolrich

When murder is the charge and a man's life hangs precariously in the balance, a little white lie can be just as dangerous as a black one!

Five Jade Dogs

An Exciting Novelette

by James D. Perry

That murder took five years to build, traveled half around the world. And the key to it—and to a runaway fortune—lay in the jade figurine of a snarling wolf.

Short Fiction Features

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

WHY THE BOSS PICKED JIM TO BE FOREMAN

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WHAT SOME OF AMERICA'S AQUATIC STARS SAY ABOUT SMOKING...

(*Left*) **LENORE KIGHT WINGARD.** She has broken 7 World's Records—16 Nat'l Records—in speed swimming. Lenore comments on smoking: "Camels are certainly mild. They never jangle my nerves."

MISS GLORIA WHEEDEN says: "I always think of smoking Camels and eating as going together."

(*Right*) **HAROLD "DUTCH" SMITH,** who holds Olympic diving championships, says: "I've found great pleasure in Camels. I long ago found Camels restore my energy after a strenuous meet."

(*Left*) **PETE DESJARDINS** — internationally famous diver—speaking: "Divers like a *mild* cigarette that doesn't upset nerves. That's why I prefer Camels."

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